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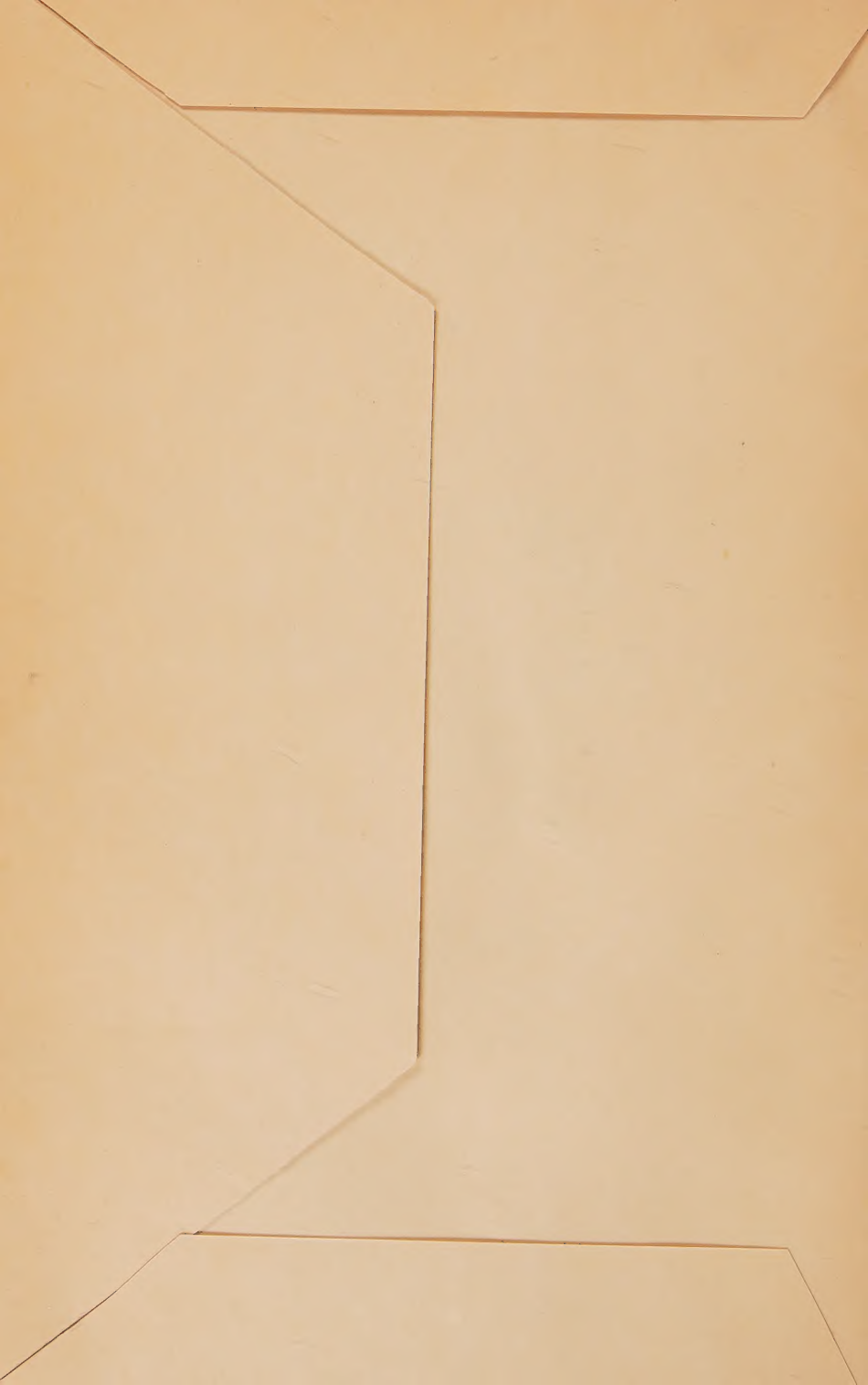
VOL. VIII



A PAGE OF LOVE

ÉMILE ZOLA

PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE BARRIE & SON, PUBLISHERS



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No. 16

THE REALISTS

ÉMILE ZOLA

A PAGE OF LOVE

VOL. II





ROMAN CONTEMPORAIN

ÉMILE ZOLA

A PAGE OF LOVE

ELEVEN ETCHINGS

VOLUME TWO



PHILADELPHIA

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THIS EDITION OF
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HAS BEEN COMPLETELY TRANSLATED

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THE ETCHINGS ARE BY

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ÉDOUARD DANTAN

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A PAGE OF LOVE

PART THIRD

(Continued)

III

The convalescence lasted for months. In August, Jeanne was still in bed. She got up for an hour or two, toward evening, and it fatigued her greatly to go as far as the window, where she remained stretched out in an arm-chair, in front of Paris lit up by the setting sun. Her poor limbs refused to carry her; as she said with a faint smile, she had not enough blood for a little bird, they must wait until she ate a great deal of soup. They cut up some raw meat for her broth. She had at last come to relish it, because she greatly desired to go down and play in the garden.

Those weeks, those months that elapsed, monotonous and charming, glided on without Hélène counting the days. She went out no more, and

remaining near Jeanne, she forgot the entire world. Not a word of news of the outside came to her. There, overlooking Paris filling the horizon with its smoke and noise, she found a retreat more remote and secluded than the holy hermitages lost among the rocks. Her child was saved, that certainty satisfied her, she spent her days watching eagerly the return of health, happy at slight changes, a bright look, or a gay movement. Hourly she found her daughter more natural, with her beautiful eyes and fine hair that was once more becoming pliant. It seemed to her that she gave her life a second time. The slower her recovery, the more she enjoyed its delights, recalling far-off days when she nursed her, and on seeing her regain strength, experiencing an emotion still keener than formerly, when she measured her two little feet in her joined hands, to know if she would soon walk.

One anxiety, however, remained. On several occasions she had remarked that shadow which blanched Jeanne's countenance, and made it suddenly distrustful and fierce.

Why, in the midst of gayety, did she so suddenly change? Was she suffering, was she concealing from her some return of pain?

"Tell me, my darling, what ails you? — You were laughing a moment ago, and here you are with a heavy heart. Answer me, have you a little pain anywhere?"

Jeanne quickly turned her head away and buried her face in the pillow.

"Nothing ails me," she said sharply. "I entreat you, leave me."

And she remained morose for an afternoon, her eyes fixed on the wall, obstinate, lapsing into bitter grief that her distracted mother could not understand. The doctor did not know what to say; the attacks always took place when he was there, and he attributed them to the patient's nervous condition. He especially recommended that she should not be opposed.

One afternoon, Jeanne was asleep. Henri had found her very well and had lingered in the room, chatting with Hélène, who was occupied anew at her endless needlework in front of the window.

Since the terrible night when, in a passionate outburst, she had acknowledged her love to him, their lives had gone on smoothly and they abandoned themselves to the joy of knowing that they loved each other, careless of the morrow and forgetful of the world. Near Jeanne's bed, in that room still influenced by the child's agony, a chastity protected them against every surprise of the senses. It calmed them to hear her innocent breathing. However, in proportion as the patient showed herself stronger, their love also gained strength; blood came to it, they remained side by side, trembling, enjoying the present hour, not desiring to ask themselves what they would do, when Jeanne should be up and when their passion would break out, free and vigorous.

For hours they pacified themselves with words, spoken at long intervals, in a low tone, so as not to wake up the little one.

Although their language might be commonplace, they were deeply moved. On that day, both were unusually impressionable.

"I swear to you that she is much better," said the doctor. "Before a fortnight she will be able to go down to the garden."

Hélène was briskly plying her needle. She murmured:

"Yesterday, she was again very sad —— But this morning, she was laughing; she promised me to be good."

There was a long silence. The child was still asleep, and her slumber cast over both of them a profound peace. When she was resting thus, they felt comforted, they belonged more to each other.

"You don't go into the garden any longer?" Henri continued. "It is full of flowers at present."

"The daisies have bloomed, have they not?" she asked.

"Yes, the flower-bed is superb —— The clematis has climbed up into the elms. One might call it a leafy nest."

Silence was renewed. Hélène ceased her sewing and looked at him with a smile, and in

thought they were both walking in dark alleys, ideal alleys black with shadow, and where showers of roses fell. He, leaning over her, was drinking in the faint odor of vervain that ascended from her dressing-gown.

But a rustling of linen disturbed them.

"She is waking," said H  l  ne, who raised her head.

Henri had moved away. He also looked in the direction of the bed. Jeanne had just taken her pillow between her little arms; and with her chin buried in the down, she had her face now turned entirely toward them. Her eyelids remained closed; she appeared to have fallen asleep again and her breathing was once more slow and regular.

"You are always sewing?" he asked, coming closer to her.

"I cannot remain with my hands unoccupied," she replied. "It is mechanical, it regulates my thoughts — For hours, I think of the same thing without fatigue."

He said nothing more, he was watching her needle that was stitching the calico with a light

rhythmical sound; and it seemed to him that that thread was bearing and joining a little of both their lives. During whole hours, she might have gone on sewing, he would have remained there listening to the language of the needle, that lulling which recalled to them the same word, without ever tiring them. It was their desire to pass days thus, in that peaceful corner, to draw near to each other, whilst the child was asleep, and they avoided moving, in order not to disturb her slumber. Delightful immobility, a silence in which they heard their hearts, an infinite sweetness that ravished them in a unique sensation of love and of eternity.

"You are good, you are good," he murmured on several occasions, finding only that word to express the joy that he owed to her.

She had once more raised her head, experiencing no embarrassment in feeling herself so ardently loved. Henri's face was close to hers. For an instant, they contemplated each other.

"Let me work," she said in a very low voice. "I shall never finish."

But at that moment an instinctive restlessness made her turn. And she saw Jeanne, her face quite pale, gazing at them with her large ink-black eyes. The child had not stirred, her chin in the down, still pressing the pillow between her little arms. She had only just opened her eyes, and was staring at them.

"Jeanne, what ails you?" Hélène asked. "Are you ill? do you want anything?"

She did not answer, she did not move, or even lower her glance, and her large fixed eyes flashed like a flame. The fierce shadow had darkened her brow, her cheeks were growing pale and hollow. Already she was turning her wrists, as at the approach of an attack of convulsions. Hélène rose quickly, entreating her to speak; but she maintained her obstinate stiffness, and fixed on her mother looks so black that the latter at last blushed and stammered:

"Doctor, look, what is taking her?"

Henri had pushed back his chair from Hélène's. He approached the bed and wanted to take hold of one of the little hands that were so strenuously

pressing the pillow. At his touch, Jeanne appeared to receive a shock. With a bound she turned towards the wall, exclaiming:

"Let me alone, you! — You hurt me!"

She had buried herself under the cover. For a quarter of an hour both vainly tried to calm her with gentle words.

As they insisted, she raised herself and with clasped hands entreated them.

"I pray you let me alone — You are hurting me. Leave me."

Hélène, overcome, went and sat down in front of the window. But Henri did not resume his place near her. They at last knew that Jeanne was jealous. They did not know what to say. The doctor walked for a minute in silence, then he withdrew, on seeing the mother's anxious look toward the bed. As soon as he had gone, she returned to her daughter, and took her up forcibly in her arms and talked to her for a long time.

"Listen, my pet, I am alone — Look at me, answer me — You are not suffering?"

Then it is I that have pained you? You must tell me all — It is with me that you feel angry? What have you on your mind?"

But it was useless for her to question, to change the form of her questions, Jeanne still swore that nothing was the matter with her. Then abruptly she exclaimed and repeated:

"You no longer love me —, you no longer love me —"

And she broke out into bitter sobs, clasping her convulsive arms around her mother's neck and covering her face with eager kisses. Hélène, heart-sick and choking with unspeakable sadness, held her long on her breast, mingling her own tears with hers and swearing to her never to love any one so dearly as her.

From that day, Jeanne's jealousy was awakened by a word or a look. As long as she had felt herself in danger, she instinctively accepted that tender love which she felt around her and which saved her. But now that she was becoming strong again, she no longer wanted to share her mother. Then she took a dislike to the doctor, a dislike

that was growing secretly and turning to hate, in proportion as she was getting better. It was brooding in her obstinate head, in her suspicious and silent little being. Never did she consent to explain herself clearly about it. She did not herself know. When the doctor approached too close to her mother, she suffered there; and she placed both her hands on her chest. That was all, that was consuming her, whilst a furious anger was strangling her and making her pale. She could not help that, either; she thought people very unjust, she grew still more stiff, and would not answer when they scolded her for being so wicked. Hélène, trembling and not daring to urge her to explain her uneasiness, diverted her glance under that look of a child of eleven, in which shone too soon all the passionate life of a woman.

"Jeanne, you are giving me a great deal of trouble," she said to her with tears in her eyes, when she saw her in an attack of mad passion, which she was restraining and which was choking her.

But these words, formerly all powerful, that brought her back in tears to H  l  ne's arms, no longer touched her. Her character was changing. Ten times in a day she showed different humors. Most frequently she spoke in a snappish and imperative tone, talking to her mother as she would have to Rosalie, putting her to inconvenience for the slightest service, becoming impatient and ever complaining.

"Give me a cup of tisane — How long you are! They are letting me die of thirst."

Then, when H  l  ne gave her the cup:

"It is not sweetened — I don't want it."

She lay down again petulantly, a second time she pushed away the drink, saying that it had too much sugar. They did not wish to take care of her any longer, they were doing it purposely. H  l  ne, who feared to make more of her, did not answer her, but looked at her, with big tears on her cheeks.

Jeanne reserved her wrath especially for the hours when the doctor came. As soon as he entered, she stretched herself at full length on the

bed and sullenly bowed her head, like those wild animals that do not tolerate the approach of a stranger. On some days she refused to speak, abandoning herself to him to feel her pulse and examine her, remaining inert, and staring at the ceiling. On other days, she did not wish to see him, and she covered her eyes with both her hands so desperately, that it became necessary to wrench her arms in order to remove them. One evening, she spoke these cruel words as her mother offered her a spoonful of potion :

“No, it is poisoning me.”

Hélène stood as though struck, her heart pierced by an acute sorrow, and dreading to fathom the meaning of these words.

“What are you saying, my child?” she asked. “Do you really know what you are saying? —— Medicines are never pleasant. This one must be taken.”

But Jeanne obstinately kept silence, turning away her head so as not to swallow the potion. From that day on, she was capricious, taking or not taking the remedies, according to the whim

of the moment. She smelled the vials and suspiciously examined them on the night-table. And when once she had refused one, she knew it again; she would rather die than drink a drop of it. The worthy Monsieur Rambaud was the only one who could prevail upon her occasionally. She now overwhelmed him with an exaggerated tenderness, especially when the doctor was there; and she stole piercing glances at her mother, to see if she suffered from that affection which she showed to another.

“Ah! it is you, kind friend!” she exclaimed as soon as he appeared. “Come and sit down here, quite close —— You have oranges?”

She raised herself up and laughingly fumbled in his pockets in which there were always some delicacies. Then she embraced him, playing a whole comedy of passion, satisfied and avenged by the torment she thought she saw on her mother's pale face. Monsieur Rambaud was radiant at having thus made peace with his little darling. In the anteroom, Hélène, however, on going to meet him, had just advised him in a

few hurried words. Then suddenly he seemed to perceive the potion on the table.

"Come! you drink syrup, then?"

Jeanne's countenance darkened. She said in an undertone:

"No, no, it is bad, it stinks, I do not drink it!"

"What! not drink it?" Monsieur Rambaud continued in a pleasant tone. "But I wager that it is very good — Will you let me drink a little of it?"

And, without waiting for permission, he poured out a large spoonful of it for himself and swallowed it without a grimace, affecting a gourmand's satisfaction.

"Oh! exquisite!" he murmured. "You are quite wrong — Wait, only a very little."

Jeanne was amused and made no further opposition. In fact, she wanted a portion of everything that Monsieur Rambaud had tasted, she attentively followed his movements and seemed to study on his countenance the effect of the drug. And for a month the good man thus gorged

and sick body was irritated by an extreme sensibility, which made her turn round abruptly, when she guessed that, behind her, they had smiled at each other. On the days on which they were especially drawn to each other, she felt it in the air that they brought to her; and on those days she was more gloomy, she suffered as nervous women suffer, at the approach of some violent storm.

Every one about H  l  ne considered Jeanne out of danger. She herself had gradually regarded this as a certainty. Finally, therefore, she treated the attacks as the ailments of a spoiled child, and of no importance. After the six weeks of anguish that she had just passed through, she felt the necessity of living. Her daughter could now get along without her care for hours; for her, therefore, who for so long had not known whether she existed, it was a delightful relaxation, a rest and a joy, to live during those hours. She rummaged her drawers, rejoiced in finding forgotten articles, concerned herself with all sorts of trifling affairs, to renew the happy course of

her daily life. And, in that renewal, her love increased; Henri was, as it were, the reward that she granted to herself for having suffered so much. In the seclusion of that room, they found themselves outside the world, having lost the memory of every obstacle. Nothing now separated them but that child, troubled by their passion.

Then it was Jeanne herself who lashed their desires. Always between them, continually spying them, she kept them under constant constraint, and made them act a comedy of indifference which intensified their emotion. During whole days, they could not exchange a word, feeling that she was listening to them, even when she seemed overcome by sleepiness. One evening Hélène had left the room with Henri; in the anteroom, mute, vanquished, she was about to fall into his arms, when Jeanne, behind the closed door, called out: "Mamma, mamma!" in a furious voice, as if she had received the counterblow of the ardent kiss which the doctor lightly pressed on her mother's hair. Hélène had to return

hurriedly, for she had just heard the child jump out of bed. She found her, shivering, angry, running around in her chemise. Jeanne no longer wished to be alone. From that day there remained to them only a pressure of the hand at meeting and parting. Madame Deberle for a month had been at the seaside with her little Lucien; the doctor, who arranged all his hours, did not dare to spend more than ten minutes with Hélène. They had discontinued their very sweet, long chats in front of the window. When they looked at each other, an increasing flame was kindled in their eyes.

What above all else completed their torture was Jeanne's changes of humor. She burst into tears one morning, as the doctor leaned over her. During a whole day, her hate was turned into a feverish tenderness; she wished him to remain beside her bed, she called her mother twenty times, as if to see them side by side, compassionate and smiling. The latter, quite happy, was already dreaming of a long succession of such days. But on the morrow, when Henri arrived,

the child received him so harshly that the mother, with a look, entreated him to withdraw; all night Jeanne had been agitated, violently regretting having been good. And, at every instant, similar scenes recurred. After the delicious hours that the child afforded them in her moments of passionate caressings, the evil hours were as lashes of a whip which drove them to desire each other the more.

Then a rebellious feeling gradually stirred Hélène. Certainly, she would have died for her daughter. But why was the mischievous child torturing her to that extent, now that she was out of danger? When she gave herself up to one of those reveries that lulled her, some vague dream in which she saw herself walking with Henri in an unknown and charming country, all of a sudden Jeanne's rigid image arose; her inmost being was rent with anguish, and her heart tortured. She was suffering too much from that struggle between her motherhood and her love.

One night, the doctor came, despite Hélène's formal prohibition. For a week past they had

not been able to exchange a word. She refused to see him; but he gently pushed her into the room, as if to reassure her. There, both thought they were sure of themselves. Jeanne was sound asleep. They sat down in their accustomed place, near the window, away from the lamp; and a calm shadow enveloped them. For two hours they chatted, bringing their faces closer together so as to speak lower, so low that they scarcely stirred a breath in the large, quiet room. Sometimes they turned their heads, casting a glance on Jeanne's fine profile, her little clasped hands resting on the centre of the sheet. But at last they became forgetful of her presence. Their lisplings rose. H  l  ne suddenly awoke and released her hands that were burning under Henri's kisses. She was chilled with horror at the crime that they had almost consummated there.

"Mamma! mamma!" Jeanne stammered, suddenly agitated, as if tortured by some nightmare.

She was struggling in her bed, her eyes heavy with sleep, trying to rise to a sitting posture.

"Hide, I entreat you, hide," Hélène said in a tone of anguish. "You will kill her, if you remain here."

Henri hastily disappeared in the recess of the window, behind one of the blue velvet curtains. But the child continued to complain.

"Mamma, mamma! oh! how I am suffering!"

"I am here, near you, my darling —— Where are you suffering?"

"I do not know —— It is here, do you see. It is burning me."

She had opened her eyes, her face was contracted, and she was resting both her little hands on her chest.

"It took me all of a sudden —— I was asleep, was I not? I felt, as it were, a great fire."

"But it is over, you feel nothing now?"

"Yes, yes, still."

And, with a restless look, she glanced around the room. Now she was completely awakened, the fierce shadow settled and paled her cheeks.

"You are alone, mamma?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, my darling!"

She shook her head, looking and scenting the air with increasing agitation.

"No, no, I know it well — There is some one — I am afraid, mamma, I am afraid! Oh! you are deceiving me, you are not alone —"

A nervous attack manifested itself, she threw herself back in bed, sobbing and hiding under the cover, as if to escape some danger. Hélène was bewildered, and made Henri leave at once. He wanted to remain in order to attend to the child. But she pushed him outside. She came back, she took Jeanne in her arms, whilst the latter repeated this complaint, that each time summed up her great sufferings:

"You no longer love me, you no longer love me!"

"Keep quiet, my angel, do not say that," the mother exclaimed. "I love you more than anything in the world — You shall see plainly whether I love you!"

She took care of her until morning, resolved to give her heart to her, frightened at seeing her love so plainly reflected in that dear creature. Her

daughter was living by her love. Next day, she required a consultation. Doctor Bodin came as if by chance and examined the patient, whom he sounded while jesting with her. Then he had a long conversation with Doctor Deberle, who had remained in the neighboring room. Both agreed that the present condition presented nothing serious; but they feared complications, they questioned H  l  ne at length, feeling themselves in the presence of one of those nervous cases that have a history in families and that disconcert science. Then she told, what they already knew in part, of her grandmother, an inmate of the Tulettes madhouse, a few miles from Plassans, of her mother's death from an attack of acute phthisis, after a life of mental disturbances and nervous crises. She took after her father, whom she resembled in countenance, and whose happy equilibrium she had. Jeanne, on the contrary, was the exact likeness of her grandmother; but she was more frail, she would never have her tall stature nor her strong bony frame. The two doctors once more enjoined great care. One could not take too many precautions in the

case of chloro-anæmic affections, which favor the development of so many cruel maladies.

Henri had listened to old Doctor Bodin with a deference that he had never had for a confrère. He consulted him about Jeanne, with the air of a pupil who doubts himself. The truth was that he at last trembled in the presence of that child; she eluded his skill, he was afraid he would kill her and lose her mother. A week elapsed. Hélène ceased to receive him in the patient's room. Then struck to the heart, sick, he ceased his visits of his own accord.

Toward the end of the month of August, Jeanne was at last able to get up and walk through the room. She laughed merrily; for a fortnight she had not had an attack. Her mother, all alone and always near her, had sufficed to cure her. At first the child remained distrustful, enjoyed her kisses, was restless at her movements, required her hand before going to sleep, and wanted to keep it during her slumber. Then seeing that no one came now, that she no longer shared her mother, she regained confidence, happy in beginning again their sweet

life of old, alone together at work in front of the window. Each day, she was getting more rosy. Rosalie said that one could see her blooming.

On certain evenings, however, at nightfall, Hélène gave way. Since her daughter's illness, she had become grave, somewhat pale, and a large wrinkle furrowed her brow that was not there previously. And when Jeanne observed one of those moments of lassitude, one of those desperate, empty hours, she herself felt very unhappy, her heart swelled with a vague remorse. Sweetly, without speaking, she hung on her neck. Then, in a low voice:

"You are happy, little mother?"

Hélène was startled. She hastened to answer:

"Oh! yes, my darling."

The child persisted.

"You are happy, you are happy? — Truly?"

"Yes, truly — Why do you think that I am not happy?"

Then Jeanne pressed her closely in her little arms, as if to reward her. She wanted to love her so much, she said, so much that one could not find a mother so happy in all Paris.

IV

In August, Doctor Deberle's garden was a veritable well of foliage. Against the trellis, the lilacs and the laburnums entwined their branches, whilst the creeping plants, the ivies, the honeysuckles, the clematis, shot out in all directions, endless branches that glided, intertwined, fell again in showers, invaded even the elms at the lower end, after having run along the walls; there, one might have said it was a tent stretched from one tree to another, the elms rising like the mighty and bushy pillars of a verdant salon. The garden was so small that the least fringe of shadow covered it. In the centre, the sun at noon made a single yellow spot, outlining the circle of the lawn, flanked by its two flower-beds. Against the stone steps, there was a large rose-bush on which enormous tea-roses bloomed by

the hundred. In the evening, when the heat decreased, their perfume became penetrating, and the odor of the roses was warm and oppressive under the elms. Nothing was more charming than that sweetly-perfumed secluded corner, into which the neighbors could not see, and which induced a dream of a virgin forest, whilst barrel-organs played polkas in the Rue Vineuse.

"Madame," Rosalie said each evening, "why does not mademoiselle go down into the garden? — She would be very comfortable under the trees."

Rosalie's kitchen was invaded by the branches of one of the young elms. She plucked off leaves with her hand, she lived in the joy of that colossal bouquet, at the bottom of which she could no longer see anything. But Hélène answered :

"She is not yet strong enough, the freshness of the shade would do her harm."

Rosalie, however, persisted. When she thought she had a good idea, she did not easily give it up. Madame was wrong in believing that the shade would do harm. It was rather that madame

was afraid to disturb anybody; but she was mistaken, mademoiselle would certainly not disturb any one, for there was never a living soul there, the gentleman was no longer to be seen there, the lady was to remain at the sea-baths until the middle of September; that fact was certain because the janitress had asked Zéphyrin to rake the garden, and for two Sundays past, Zéphyrin and she had spent the afternoon there. Oh! it was pretty, it was pretty beyond belief!

Hélène still refused. Jeanne seemed to have a strong desire to go into the garden, of which she had often spoken during her illness; but a singular feeling, an embarrassment that made her droop her eyes, appeared to prevent her from insisting with her mother. At last, on the following Sunday, the housemaid presented herself, quite out of breath, saying:

“Oh! madame, there is no one, I swear to you. There is only myself and Zéphyrin, who is raking — Let her come. You cannot imagine how well one feels. Come a little while, only a little while, just to see.”

And she was so convinced that H  l  ne yielded. She wrapped Jeanne in a shawl, and told Rosalie to take a heavy blanket. The child was delighted, but she evidenced it only by her large lustrous eyes, she wanted to go down-stairs without being assisted, in order to show her strength. Behind her, her mother extended her arms, ready to support her. When they entered the garden, both uttered an exclamation of surprise. They did not recognize it, so little did that impenetrable thicket resemble the neat and bourgeois corner that they had seen in the spring.

“I told you so!” Rosalie asserted triumphantly.

The clumps had grown larger, changing the alleys into narrow paths, outlining an entire labyrinth in which the skirts caught in passing. One would have thought it was a distant nook in a forest, under the vault of foliage penetrated by a green light, gently and mysteriously charming. H  l  ne sought the elm at the foot of which she had sat in April.

“But,” she said, “I do not want her to remain here. The shade is too cool.”

"Wait, then," the housemaid continued. "You shall see."

In three steps, one crossed this forest. There, in the centre of the hollow of verdure, on the lawn, they found the sunlight, a broad golden ray that fell, warm and noiseless, as if into a clearing. On looking up, one saw only branches standing out against the blue canopy of heaven—with all the delicacy of lace. The tea-roses on the large bush, drooping a little from the heat, slept on their stalks. In the flower-beds, red and white daisies, of an old-fashioned hue, appeared like the borders of old tapestry.

"You are going to see," Rosalie repeated. "Let me do it. It is I who am going to arrange it."

She had just folded and spread out the blanket on the border of the path, at a point where the shade ended. Then she made Jeanne sit down, covering her shoulders with the shawl and telling her to stretch out her little limbs. In that way, the child had her head in the shade and her feet in the sun.

"You are all right, my darling?" H  l  ne asked.

"Oh! yes," she replied. "You see, I am not cold. One might say that I was warming myself at a big fire — Oh! how one breathes, how good it is!"

Then Hélène, who was looking with an anxious air at the closed shutters of the house, said that she was going up for an instant. And she gave all sorts of directions to Rosalie: she must closely watch the sun, she must not leave Jeanne there more than half an hour, she must not take her eyes off her.

"Don't be afraid, then, mamma!" exclaimed the little one, who was laughing. "There are no carriages passing here."

When she was alone, she took handfuls of the gravel that was beside her, amusing herself by making them fall in showers from one hand into the other. Meantime, Zéphyrin was raking. When he saw madame and mademoiselle, he made haste to put on his top-coat again, which was hanging on a branch; and he stood, abandoning the raking out of respect. During the whole of Jeanne's illness, he had come according to his custom, every

Sunday; but he slipped into the kitchen with so many precautions that H  l  ne would never have suspected his presence, if Rosalie had not asked each time for news on his behalf, adding that he was sharing the sorrow of the house. Oh! he behaved with fine manners, as she said; he was taking the rust off nicely in Paris. And so, leaning on his rake, he addressed Jeanne with a sympathetic shake of his head. When she noticed him, she smiled.

"I have been quite ill," she said.

"I know, mademoiselle," he replied, placing one hand on his heart.

Then he wanted to think of something polite—a pleasantry that would enliven the situation. And he added:

"Your health has been resting, you see. Now, it is going to hum again."

Jeanne had picked up a handful of pebbles. Then, satisfied with himself, and laughing with a silent laugh that split his mouth from ear to ear, he resumed his raking, with all the strength of his arms. The sound of the rake on the gravel was monotonous and harsh. After a few minutes,

Rosalie, who noticed that the little one was absorbed in her play, happy and quite peaceful, moved away from her step by step, as if attracted by the grinding of the rake. Zéphyrin was on the other side of the lawn, in the full sunshine.

"You are sweating like an ox," she murmured. "Take off your top-coat, then. Mademoiselle will not be offended, go on!"

He got rid of his top-coat and again hung it on a branch. His red trousers, which were fastened at the waist by a leather girdle, were very far up, while his coarse brown linen shirt, held at the neck by a hair collar, was so stiff that it swelled out and made him still rounder. He tucked up his sleeves while waddling along, anxious to show Rosalie once more two inflamed hearts that he had had tattooed on himself in the regiment, with the device: *Forever*.

"Did you go to Mass this morning?" asked Rosalie, who subjected him to this questioning every Sunday.

"To Mass —, to Mass —," he repeated, maliciously.





His two red ears stood out from his very closely-clipped head, and his entire little round person expressed an extremely bantering air.

"Without a doubt I went there, to Mass," he at last said.

"You lie!" Rosalie continued vehemently. "I see clearly that you are lying, your nose is twitching! — Ah! Zéphyrin, you are being lost, you have no longer any religion whatever — Mistrust yourself!"

As his only answer, with a gallant gesture, he wished to put his arm about her waist. But she seemed scandalized and exclaimed:

"I am going to make you put on your top-coat again, if you don't behave properly! — You have no shame! There is mademoiselle looking at you."

Then Zéphyrin raked his best. Jeanne had indeed just raised her eyes. Her play had wearied her somewhat; after the pebbles, she had picked up leaves and plucked grass; but a languor crept over her, she enjoyed herself more doing nothing, and looking at the sun, which was

gradually gaining on her. A little while ago she was steeped in that warm bath of rays only as far as her knees; now they reached to the waist, and the warmth was still ascending, she felt it increasingly warm, like a caress, with a very gentle glowing. What especially amused her were the round spots, of a fine golden yellow, that danced on her shawl. One would have said they were dumb creatures. She threw back her head to see if they would creep up to her face. While waiting, she had joined her two little hands in the sunshine. How thin they seemed! how transparent they were! The sunshine passed through, they seemed to her pretty, however, of a shell-pink color, slender and long, like the baby hands of a Jesus. Then the open air, those big trees around her, that warmth, had made her somewhat dizzy. She thought she was asleep, and yet she saw and heard. It was very good, very sweet.

“Mademoiselle, suppose you move back,” said Rosalie, who had returned close to her. “The sun is making you too warm.”

But Jeanne, with a gesture, refused to stir. She felt herself too well off. At present she was concerned only with the housemaid and the little soldier, giving way to one of those fits of curiosity which children have about things that people conceal from them. Slyly, she drooped her eyes, wishing to have it believed that she was not looking; and, between her long eyelashes, she was spying whilst she seemed to be quite drowsy.

Rosalie remained there a few minutes longer. She was powerless against the noise of the rake. Once more, she accompanied Zéphyrin, step by step, as if in spite of herself. She scolded him about his new manners; but, in reality, she was smitten, impressed to the heart, full of silent admiration. The little soldier, in his long strolls with his comrades, in the Jardin des Plantes and on the Place du Château-d'Eau, where his barracks were, acquired the balanced and airy graces of the Parisian soldier. He learned his rhetoric, his gallant effusions and his intricacies of style, so flattering to the ladies. At times she was choked with pleasure on hearing phrases that he repeated

to her with a pompous shrug of the shoulders, in which were words that she did not understand and that made her blush with pride. The uniform no longer embarrassed him; he swung his arms as if he would unhinge them, with a swaggering air; he had, above all, a way of wearing his shako on the back of his head, which showed off his round face and his tilted nose, whilst the shako gently followed the rolling movement of his body. He had become free, took his dram, noted the shape of the fair sex. Certainly, he knew more about it than she did, now, with his way of chuckling and saying nothing more about it. Paris was polishing him too much. And delighted, but furious, she planted herself in front of him, hesitating between the two desires of clawing him and of saying stupid things.

Zéphyrin, however, while raking, had turned in the path. He found himself behind a large spindle-tree, casting sidelong glances at Rosalie, while he seemed to be drawing her towards him, little by little with his rake. When she was quite close, he pinched her rudely on the hips.

"Don't halloo, that's how I love you!" he murmured, in a husky voice. "And put that on top!"

He kissed her, come what might, on the ear. Then, as Rosalie, in her turn, pinched him hard enough to make him bleed, he gave her another kiss, planting it this time on her nose. She was scarlet, quite pleased in reality, but exasperated at not being able to give him a box on the ear, because of mademoiselle.

"I pricked myself," she said on returning to Jeanne, to explain the slight cry that she had uttered.

But the child had observed the scene through the slender branches of the spindle-tree. The soldier's red trousers and his shirt made a brilliant spot in the verdure. She slowly raised her eyes to Rosalie and looked at her for an instant, while the latter blushed still more, her lips moist and her hair flowing. Then she again drooped her eyelids, took up a handful of pebbles but had not the strength to play; and she remained with both hands on the warm earth, drowsy, in

the midst of the sun's vibrating rays. A flood of health was rising within her and stifling her. The trees seemed to her to be gigantic and mighty, and the roses were bathing her with their perfume. She was dreaming vaguely in surprise and delight.

"What are you thinking about, mademoiselle?" Rosalie asked, anxiously.

"I do not know—of nothing," Jeanne replied. "Ah! yes, I know —— You see, I should like to live to be very old ——"

But she could not explain this expression. It was an idea that came to her, she said. But in the evening, after dinner, as she continued in a dreamy mood, and on her mother interrogating her, she suddenly put this question:

"Mamma, do cousins get married?"

"No doubt," said Hélène. "Why do you ask me that?"

"For nothing —— just to know."

Hélène, however, was accustomed to her extraordinary questions. The child found herself so well as the result of the hour spent in the garden

that she went down there every sunshiny day. Hélène's resistance gradually disappeared; the house was still closed, Henri did not show himself, and she at last consented to remain and sit near Jeanne, on one end of the blanket. But the following Sunday morning, she was uneasy on seeing the windows open.

"Mercy! it is necessary to air the rooms," said Rosalie, so as to get her to go down. "I swear to you that nobody is there!"

On that day the weather was still warmer. A shower of golden arrows pierced the foliage. Jeanne, who was getting strong, walked for nearly ten minutes, leaning on her mother's arm. Then, fatigued, she returned to her blanket, leaving a small place for Hélène. They smiled at each other, amused at being thus together on the ground. Zéphyrin, who had finished raking, was helping Rosalie to gather parsley, wild clusters of which were growing along the end wall.

All of a sudden there was a great noise in the house; and just as Hélène was thinking of scampering away, Madame Deberle appeared on the

steps. She was in her traveling dress, talking loudly, and very busy. But when she perceived Madame Grandjean and her daughter on the ground, in front of the lawn, she hurried to them and overwhelmed them with caresses and stunned them with her remarks.

“What! it is you! —— Ah! how happy I am at seeing you! —— Kiss me, my little Jeanne. You have ’been quite ill, have you not, my poor deary? But you are getting better, look, you are quite rosy —— How often I have thought of you, my dear! I wrote to you, you received my letters? You must have spent very terrible hours. However, it is over —— Will you let me kiss you?”

Hélène had got up. She had to allow her to print two kisses on her cheeks and to return them. Those caresses froze her, she stammered:

“You will excuse us for having invaded your garden.”

“You are jesting,” Juliette replied impetuously. “Are you not at home here?”

She left them for an instant, went up the steps again, so as to call through the wide open rooms :

“Pierre, don’t forget anything, there are seventeen packages!”

She returned immediately and spoke of her journey.

“Oh! an adorable season. We were at Trouville, you know. Everybody on the beach, a throng! And all of the best. I had visitors, oh! visitors —— Papa came to spend a fortnight with Pauline. No matter, one is glad to return home —— Ah! I have not told you —— But, no, I will tell you that later on.”

She stooped, embraced Jeanne again, then became serious and put this question :

“Am I tanned?”

“No, I do not observe it,” replied H  l  ne, who was looking at her.

Juliette’s eyes were clear and expressionless, her hands plump, her pretty countenance amiable. She was not aging; the sea air itself had not been able to disturb the serenity of her

indifference. She might be returning from a trip about Paris, from a round among her tradesmen, bearing in herself the reflection of their displays. Still she was overflowing with affection, and H  l  ne was the more embarrassed because she felt constrained and ill at ease. Jeanne did not move from her place on the rug, but only raised her fine pain-worn face, her hands clasped for warmth in the sunshine.

“Wait, you have not seen Lucien!” Juliette exclaimed. “You must see him — He is enormous!”

And when they had brought the little boy to her, after the chambermaid had washed the dust of travel from his face, she pushed and turned him around, to show him off. Lucien, fat, chubby-faced, quite tanned from having played on the beach in the sea breeze, seemed bursting with health, even as though overfat, and he looked sullen because they had just washed him. He was badly wiped, one cheek being still wet and red from the rubbing of the towel. When he saw Jeanne he stopped short, surprised. She

looked at him with her poor thin face, as white as linen, against her black flowing hair, whose curls fell to her shoulders. Her fine eyes, dilated and sad, seemed to occupy her whole face; and, in spite of the great heat, she trembled slightly, whilst her chilly hands were always outstretched as if before a great fire.

“Well! are you not going to kiss her?” said Juliette.

But Lucien seemed to be afraid. At last he decided, and cautiously reached out his lips, so as to approach the patient as little as possible. Then he hurriedly drew back. Great tears stood in Hélène’s eyes. How well that child was! And her Jeanne was breathless after having made the tour of the lawn! Some were indeed fortunate! Juliette suddenly understood his cruelty. Then she was angry at Lucien.

“Come! what a blockhead you are! — Is that the way to kiss girls? — You have no idea, my dear, he became unmanageable at Trouville.”

She was getting mixed. Fortunately for her, the doctor appeared. She got out of it by exclaiming:

"Ah! there is Henri!"

He had not expected them until evening. But she had taken another train. And she explained at great length why, without succeeding in making it clear. The doctor was listening, smiling.

"At any rate, you are here," he said. "That is all that is necessary."

He had just greeted H  l  ne with a bow. For an instant his glance fell on Jeanne; then, embarrassed, he turned away his head. The little one had borne that look gravely; and, unclasping her hands, with an instinctive movement she seized her mother's dress and drew her to her.

"Ah! the merry wag!" repeated the doctor, who had picked up Lucien and was kissing him on the cheeks. "He is growing like magic."

"Well! as to me, am I forgotten?" Juliette asked.

She raised her head to him. Then, still holding Lucien on one arm, he leaned over to kiss his wife. All three smiled at one another.

H  l  ne, who became very pale, spoke of going up. But Jeanne refused; she wanted to see all,

her lingering looks were fixed on the Deberles, then cast toward her mother. When Juliette had extended her lips to her husband's kiss, a bright gleam lighted up the child's eyes.

"He is too heavy," continued the doctor, as he set Lucien on the ground again. "Then the season was a good one? — I saw Malignon yesterday, he told me of his stay down there — You let him set out, then, before you?"

"Oh! he is unbearable!" murmured Juliette, who became serious, while her face assumed an air of embarrassment. "He exasperated us all the time."

"Your father was thinking about Pauline — Our man has not declared himself!"

"Who! Malignon?" she exclaimed in surprise and as if offended.

She betrayed her annoyance by a gesture.

"Ah! leave him alone, the oddity! — How happy I am to be at home!"

Without apparent transition, she gave way to one of her surprising effusions, so natural to her bird-like nature. She pressed herself close to her

husband, looking up to him. Indulgent and tender, he held her for an instant in his arms. They seemed to have forgotten that they were not alone.

Jeanne did not withdraw her glances from them. A fit of passion was making her colorless lips tremble, she had the air of a jealous and desperate woman. The pain from which she was suffering was so keen that she had to look in another direction. It was at that moment that she saw, at the lower end of the garden, Rosalie and Zéphyrin still searching for parsley. In order not to disturb the folks, doubtless, they had made their way into the thickest of the clumps, where both were squatting on the ground. Zéphyrin had slyly taken hold of one of Rosalie's feet, whilst she, without speaking, was reaching out and slapping him. Between two branches, Jeanne saw the little soldier's face, a moon-shaped, youthful face, deeply flushed and bursting with an amorous laugh. There was a struggle and the little soldier and the housemaid rolled out of sight behind the foliage. The sun's rays were

falling perpendicularly, the trees were motionless in the warm air, without the stirring of a leaf. An odor stole from beneath the elms, the heavy odor of the earth unworked by the spade. The last roses were slowly shedding their petals, one by one on the steps. Then Jeanne, her heart swollen, turned her gaze again toward her mother; and finding her motionless and mute in the presence of what was happening, looked at her with an expression of supreme anguish, one of those penetrating looks of a child that one dare not challenge.

Madame Deberle, meanwhile, had approached her, saying :

“I hope that we are going to see each other —— Since Jeanne is well, she must come down every afternoon.”

Hélène was already seeking an excuse, so she pretended that she did not wish to fatigue her too much.

But Jeanne abruptly interfered :

“No, no, the sun is good for me —— We will come down, madame. You will keep my place for me, will you not?”

And as the doctor was still behind them, she smiled at him.

"Doctor, tell mamma that the air does me no harm."

He stepped forward, and that man inured to human suffering, blushed slightly on hearing the sweet accents of that child.

"Undoubtedly," he murmured, "the open air can only hasten convalescence."

"Ah! you see clearly, little mother, we shall have to come," she said with a charming look of tenderness, whilst tears were choking her.

But Pierre had reappeared on the steps; the lady's seventeen packages had been taken in. Juliette, followed by her husband and Lucien, made her escape, declaring that she was dirty enough to scare one and that she was going to take a bath. When they were alone, Hélène knelt on the blanket, as if to refasten the shawl around Jeanne's neck. Then, in a low voice:

"You are, then, no longer angry at the doctor?"

The child answered by a prolonged shake of her head.

“No, mamma.”

Then there was a moment of silence. Hélène, with her trembling and awkward hands, seemed to be unable to tie the knot of the shawl. Jeanne then murmured:

“Why does he love others? — I do not want —”

And her lowering glance became severe, whilst her little outstretched hands caressed her mother's shoulders. The latter felt impelled to cry out, but she was afraid of the words that rose to her lips. The sun was sinking; both went up. Zéphyrin, however, had reappeared with a bouquet of parsley, which he was sorting, while casting murderous looks at Rosalie. The housemaid, keeping at a distance, was distrustful now that there was no longer any one there; and as he pinched her, just as she was stooping to roll up the blanket, she struck him a blow in the back, with her fist, producing a sound like that of an empty cask. That filled him with delight. He was laughing at it to himself even when he returned to the kitchen, still sorting his parsley.

From that day Jeanne manifested an aversion to going down into the garden, as soon as she heard Madame Deberle's voice there. She listened greedily to Rosalie's tittle-tattle about the little neighboring house, concerned about the life that they were leading there, running from the room sometimes and going herself to spy at the kitchen window. When in the garden, buried in a little arm-chair that Juliette had brought for her from the parlor, she appeared to watch over the family, was reserved with Lucien and impatient at his questions and his play, especially when the doctor was there. Then she stretched herself out, as if weary, her eyes wide open and staring about her. Those afternoons were times of great suffering to Hélène. She returned, however, she returned despite the revolt of her whole being. Each time that Henri, on his arrival, pressed a kiss on Juliette's hair, her heart bounded. And if at those moments, in order to conceal her disturbed countenance, she feigned to be concerned about Jeanne, she found the child paler than herself, her large black eyes wide open, and her chin twitching

with a restrained wrath. Jeanne suffered with her. There were days on which her mother, exhausted and heart-sore from love, would turn away her looks, then the child remained so gloomy and so helpless that it was necessary to take her upstairs again and put her to bed. She could no longer see the doctor approach his wife without changing countenance, shuddering, looking at him with a burning glance like that of a betrayed mistress.

"I cough in the morning," she said to him one day. "You must come and you will see."

The rainy season came on. Jeanne wanted the doctor to recommence his visits. She was getting on much better, however. Her mother, to satisfy her, had to accept two or three invitations to dinners at the Deberles'. The child whose heart had for so long been torn by a hidden struggle, appeared to be once more calm when her health was completely restored. She repeated her question :

"You are happy, little mother?"

"Yes, very happy, my darling."

Then she became radiant. They would have to pardon her former acts of naughtiness, she said. She spoke of them as attacks independent of her will, as a disease of the head that had seized her suddenly. Something swelled within her, she did not in the least know what. All sorts of ideas were warring, vague ideas, wretched dreams which she could not even repeat. But it was over, she was well, they would not return again.

V

Night was falling. From the pale heavens, in which the early stars were shining, fine ashes seemed to rain over the great city incessantly, slowly burying it. The hollows were already blotted out by great masses of shadow, whilst a bar, like a wave of ink, was mounting from the distant horizon, and swallowing the remains of daylight, the lingering glimmers that were retreating toward the west. Below Passy, only some few rows of roofs were still visible. Then the wave rolled onward, and all was dark.

"What a warm evening!" murmured Hélène, who was seated in front of the window, languid from the warm breezes that Paris wafted to her.

"A fine night for the poor folks," said the Abbé, standing behind her. "The autumn will be mild."

On that Tuesday, Jeanne had become drowsy at dessert, and seeing that she was somewhat fatigued, her mother had put her in her little bed. She was already asleep, whilst Monsieur Rambaud, sitting at the table, was gravely engaged in mending a plaything, a talking and walking mechanical doll, which he had given her, and which she had broken; he was an adept at that sort of work. Hélène, needing fresh air and suffering from the lingering heat of that September, had just thrown the window wide open; that sea of shadow, that black expanse stretched before her, soothed her. She had pushed forward an arm-chair to isolate herself, and was surprised at hearing the priest. He continued, gently:

“Have you put enough covering on the little one? —— The air is always keen at this height.”

But she yearned for silence, and did not answer. She was tasting the charm of twilight, the extinction of objects, the stilling of sounds. On the pinnacles of spires and towers there appeared gleams, as of watch-lights, Saint-Augustin became first extinct, the Panthéon for an instant retained a bluish glimmer, the brilliant dome of the Invalides

set like a moon in a rising sea of clouds. It was night, like an expanse of ocean stretching away through the deeps of darkness, an abyss of blackness in which a world was shrouded. A mighty yet soft wind blew from the invisible city. In the still swelling, lingering murmur, sounds could be distinguished, faint but clear, a quick rumble of omnibuses on the quay, the whistling of a train crossing the Point-du-Jour bridge; and the Seine, swollen by the late storms, with the throbbing movement of a living being, was flowing in its magnificent width, spread out below, wrapped in shadow. A warm odor arose in fumes from the still scorching roofs, whilst the river, amid all that slow exhalation of the heat of the day, was sending forth cool and gentle airs. Vanished Paris had the dreamy restfulness of a colossus submitting to the mantle of night, and remaining there motionless for a moment, with open eyes.

Nothing moved H  l  ne more than that minute's break in the life of the city. For three months she had not gone out, and pinned close to Jeanne's bed, she had no other companion while watching

by the patient's pillow than the great Paris stretching out to the horizon. During those heated days of July and August, the windows remained almost continually open, she could not cross the room, stir or turn her head, without seeing it before her, developing its never-ending picture. It was there, at all times, half entering into her sorrows and into her hopes, like an intrusive friend. She was ignorant of it still, she had never been so far from it or more indifferent about its streets and its people; yet it filled her solitude. Those few square feet of flooring, that room of suffering whose door she so carefully shut, was open quite wide to that city by its two windows. She had often wept while looking at it, when she came to lean her elbows on the windowsill in order to conceal her tears from the patient; one day, the day on which she had believed her lost to her, she had remained for a long time, suffocating, strangling, following with her eyes the fumes of the Manutention as they escaped and disappeared. Often also, in the hours of hope, she had confided the eager desires of her heart to the dim distances of the faubourgs. There was not a

moment now that did not recall to her a sad or a happy emotion. Paris lived with her. But never did she love it more than at twilight, when, the day over, it yielded to a quarter of an hour's calm, forgetfulness, and musing, while waiting for the gas to be lighted.

"What a host of stars!" the Abbé Jouve murmured. "They shine by thousands."

He had just taken a chair and sat down beside her. Then she raised her eyes and watched the summer sky. The constellations studded the heavens with their gold. A planet, almost on the level of the horizon, was shining like a ruby, whilst a dust of almost invisible stars was sparkling the vault, as it were, with brilliant sand. Charles's Wain was slowly turning its shaft in the air.

"Look," she said in her turn, "that tiny blue star, in that corner of the sky, I see it every evening — But it disappears, it retrogrades each night."

The Abbé no longer embarrassed her. His presence added to her peace. They exchanged a

few words at long intervals. On two occasions, she questioned him as to the names of stars. The view of the heavens had always perplexed her. But he hesitated, he did not know.

"You see," she asked, "that beautiful star that is so purely brilliant?"

"To the left, you mean?" he said, "near another smaller one, of a greenish hue — There are too many of them, I have forgotten."

They were silent, their eyes still raised to the heavens, dazzled and trembling slightly at the sight of that increasing swarm of stars. In that infinite depth of sky, behind the thousands of already visible stars, thousands of others made their appearance incessantly. It was a continuous lighting up, as it were, the stirred embers of worlds burning with the calm fire of precious stones. The Milky Way was already whitening, developing its solar atoms, so innumerable and so far off, that they only appear in the starry vault like a scarf of light.

"It fills me with awe," said H  l  ne in a subdued tone.

And she bent her head so as to see no more, her eyes sought again the gaping void in which Paris seemed to be swallowed. Not yet a glimmer there, night's darkness equally shrouded all; an impenetrable darkness. The loud and continuous voice of the city now reached her in hushed tones.

"Are you weeping? ——" asked the Abbé, who had heard a sobbing sound.

"Yes," Hélène merely replied.

They did not see each other. She wept for a long time, her whole being seemed to be murmuring. Behind them, meanwhile, Jeanne was asleep and shedding around her the innocent calm of her slumber, whilst Monsieur Rambaud, absorbed, was bending his grizzly head over the doll, whose members he had disjoined. At moments, sharp sounds were made by the released springs, a sort of childlike utterance produced by the pressure of his big fingers in spite of his gentle handling of the disordered mechanism. And when the doll had squeaked too loudly, he stopped short, fidgety and vexed, and glancing at Jeanne to see if he had wakened her. Then he resumed his mending very

cautiously, using as his only tools a pair of scissors and a bodkin.

“Why do you weep, my daughter?” the Abbé continued. “Can I afford you any comfort?”

“Ah! let me be,” Hélène murmured; “these tears do me good — In a moment, in a moment —”

She could not answer his question, a sensation of choking prevented her. In that same place, once before a fit of weeping had completely overcome her; but she had been alone, she could sob in the dark, weak and waiting till the spring of emotion that filled her had become exhausted. She did not know, however, of any cause of sorrow: her daughter was restored to health, and she had resumed the monotonous and charming tenor of her life. It seemed to her as if the weight of a bitter sorrow had suddenly fallen on her, as if there were an unfathomable chasm that she could never fill, a boundless despair in which she was foundering with all who were dear to her. She could not define her fears of the misfortune that thus threatened her; but she was hopeless, and she wept.

Already, in the church perfumed with flowers of the month of Mary, she had experienced similar emotions. The vast limits of Paris, seen in the twilight, made a profound religious impression on her. The plain seemed to spread out, and from those two million living souls who were being effaced, there ascended a melancholy influence. Then, when it was dark, and the city with its dying murmurs was lost to view, her overburdened heart rebelled and her tears flowed under the power of that sovereign peace. She would have clasped her hands and prayed haltingly. Her need of faith, of love, of divine absorption, thrilled her. In that state, the rising of the stars overwhelmed her with sacred enjoyment and terror.

After a long silence, the Abbé Jouve pressed his question.

"My daughter, you must confide in me. Why do you hesitate?"

She was still weeping, but with a child's gentleness, as if weary and without strength.

"The Church frightens you," he continued. "For a time, I thought you won over to God. But it

has been otherwise ordained. Heaven has its designs —— Well! since you distrust the priest, why should you longer refuse to confide in the friend?"

"You are right," she stammered, "yes, I am troubled, and I need you —— I must confess these things to you. When I was little, I hardly ever entered a church; now, I cannot attend a ceremony without being profoundly moved. Now see: what a moment ago made me weep is that voice of Paris that resembles the pealing of organs, that immensity of night, that glorious sky —— Ah! I long to believe. Help me, teach me."

The Abbé Jouve calmed her by lightly laying his hand on hers.

"Tell me all," he merely answered.

She battled with herself for an instant, stricken with anguish.

"Nothing is the matter with me, I swear to you —— I am concealing nothing from you —— I am weeping without cause, because I am smothering, because my tears gush forth of their own accord —— You know my life. I could find in it up to this time neither sorrow, nor sin, nor

remorse —— And I do not know, I do not know ——”

Her voice died out. Then the priest slowly uttered these words :

“ You are in love, my daughter.”

She started, she dared not protest. Silence reigned again. In the sea of slumbering darkness before them, a gleam had shone. It was at their feet, somewhere in the abyss, at a point that they could not determine. And, one by one, other gleams appeared. They were rapidly piercing the darkness, and suddenly they remained fixed, scintillating like stars. It seemed like another rising of stars on the surface of a dark lake. Ere long they formed a double line, starting from the Trocadéro and leaping like points of light away toward Paris; then, other lines of luminous points intersected this one, curves were outlined, and a strange, magnificent constellation spread out. Hélène did not speak a word, but her look followed those scintillations, whose fires seemed to extend the heavens below the horizon, prolonging the infinite, as if the earth had disappeared and one saw

the celestial circle on all sides. And H  l  ne again experienced the emotion that had overwhelmed her some minutes before, when Charles's Wain had slowly turned around the polar axis, its shaft in the air. Paris, brightening with lights, spread out, melancholy and deep, arousing terrible dreams of a firmament of swarming worlds.

The priest, meanwhile, whispered for a long time in her ear, in that monotonous and mild voice which the habit of the confessional gave him. He had warned her one evening, he had, in fact, told her that a life of solitude was not good for her. One cannot put one's self with impunity outside the circle of ordinary life. She had cloistered herself too much, she had opened the door to dangerous dreams.

"I am quite old, my daughter," he murmured. "I have often seen women coming to us, weeping, praying, confessing their need of faith and humility — And so I can scarcely be deceived to-day. Those women, who seem to seek God so ardently, are only poor hearts troubled by passion. It is a man whom they adore in our churches."

She was not listening to him, her agitation was extreme through the effort she was making at least to see clearly into her innermost self. Her avowal escaped her in low, broken tones.

“Well, yes, I love —— And that is all. Beyond that, I know nothing, I know nothing ——”

He avoided interrupting her now. She spoke feverishly, in short phrases; and she took a painful pleasure in confessing her love, in sharing with that old man the secret that had troubled her so long.

“I swear to you that I cannot understand myself —— This came upon me without my knowledge. Perhaps quite suddenly. However, I felt its sweetness only after a time —— Moreover, why make myself stronger than I am? I did not try to escape, I was too happy; to-day, I have still less courage —— See, my daughter was ill, I almost lost her; well! my love was as deep as my sorrow, it has come back supreme after those terrible days, it possesses me, and I feel myself carried away ——”

She drew breath again, shuddering.

“At last I am at the end of my strength —— You were right, my friend, it comforts me to confide these things to you —— But I entreat you, tell me what is taking place in the depths of my heart. I was once so calm, so happy. A thunderbolt has devastated my life. Why mine? why not another’s? for I had done nothing to merit it, I thought myself well protected —— And if you knew! I no longer know myself —— Ah! help me, save me!”

Seeing that she was silent, the priest, with the customary liberty of a confessor, asked her mechanically:

“The name, tell me his name?”

She was hesitating, when a peculiar noise made her turn her head. It was the doll that, in Monsieur Rambaud’s hands, was gradually resuming its mechanical life; it had taken three steps on the table, its still badly working wheels creaking; then it had tumbled backwards, and, but for the good man, it would have rebounded to the floor. He followed it with outstretched hands, ready to hold it up, and full of paternal anxiety. When

he saw H  l  ne turn, he turned to her with a confident smile, as if to assure her that the doll would soon walk. And he began again to dive into the toy with his scissors and his bodkin. Jeanne was still asleep.

Then H  l  ne, soothed by those peaceful surroundings, murmured a name in the priest's ear. The latter did not move. In the shadow his face could not be seen. He spoke after an interval of silence.

"I knew it, but I wanted to hear you avow it — My daughter, you must be suffering terribly."

And he uttered no commonplace phrase about duties. H  l  ne, crushed and sad, and ready to die under the influence of his placid pity, once more watched the sparks that were spangling with gold the sombre mantle of Paris. They were being infinitely multiplied. It was like those fires that course through the black ashes of burned paper. At first those luminous points had set out from the Trocad  ro, going towards the heart of the city. Ere long another flashing appeared to the left,

towards Montmartre; then another to the right, behind the Invalides, and still another, farther back, near the Panthéon. From all those centres, flights of small flames descended at the same moment.

"You remember our conversation," the Abbé continued slowly. "I have not changed my opinion — You must be married, my daughter."

"I!" she said, crushed. "But I have just acknowledged to you — You well know that I cannot —"

"You must be married," he repeated with more energy. "You will marry an honest man —"

He seemed to have grown taller in his old cassock. His ridiculously big head, which was ordinarily leaning on one shoulder, with his eyes half-shut, was now raised, and his eyes were so earnest and brilliant that she saw them shining in the darkness.

"You will marry an honest man who will be a father to your Jeanne and who will bring you back to your former virtuous way."

"But I do not love him — *Mon Dieu!* I do not love him —"

"You will love him, my daughter —— He loves you, and he is kind-hearted."

Hélène struggled with herself, and lowered her voice on hearing the slight noise that Monsieur Rambaud was making behind them. He was so patient and so strong in his hope, that for six months he had not even once urged his love for her. He was waiting with the calmness of confidence, disposed as he was by nature to make heroic self-sacrifices.

The Abbé moved as if about to turn around.

"Do you wish me to tell him everything? —— He will offer you his hand, he will save you. And you will fill him with unbounded joy."

She stopped him, bewildered. Her heart revolted. Both of these men frightened her, they were so peaceful and tender, their reasoning was undisturbed, while she suffered from the fever of her passion. What world did they live in, that they could resist all that caused her so much distress?

The priest, with a movement of his hand that embraced a wide expanse, pointed to the vast space.

“My daughter, observe this beautiful night, this supreme peace that contrasts with your agitation — Why do you decline happiness?”

All Paris was lit up. The little dancing flames had riven the sea of darkness from one end of the horizon to the other, and now millions of stars were burning with a fixed brilliancy, in the serenity of a summer night. Not a breath of wind, not a quiver stirred those lights that seemed as if suspended in space. Paris, which was not visible, had sunk to the bottom of an apparently bottomless abyss, as vast as a firmament. Low down on the slopes of the Trocadéro, at times a sudden gleam, the lamps of a hack or of an omnibus pierced the gloom like the trail of a shooting star; and there, in the light of the gas jets, which shone like a yellow mist, house fronts in a confused jumble could be seen, clumps of trees whose green was of the tint of stage foliage. On the Pont des Invalides points of light were incessantly crossing one another; whilst below, standing marvelously out against a band of denser gloom, was a line of comets whose golden tails

scattered a shower of sparks; the reflections of the bridge lamps were cast in the black waters of the Seine. But, beyond, the unknown began. The long curve of the river was traced by a double row of gas lamps, intersected at different points by other rows; it might be called a ladder of light, thrown across Paris, resting its two ends on the verge of the heavens, among the stars. To the left, another chasm descended and the Champs-Élysées showed a regular line of stars from the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde, where another Pleiades scintillated; then, the Tuileries, the Louvre, the blocks of houses on the water's edge, the Hôtel de Ville far away at the lower end, formed dark bars, separated at long distances by the brilliant illumination of some broad square; and farther in the background, amid the confusion of roofs, the lights were scattered, so that only the hollow that marked a street could be discerned, the corner of a boulevard, or the broad opening out of a square on fire. On the other bank, to the right, only the Esplanade was clearly outlined, with its

rectangle of flame, like some Orion of the winter nights, stripped of its baldrick; the long streets of the Saint-Germain quarter looked dull with their lamps at long intervals; beyond, the populous quarters gleamed like small, slow-burning fires sparkling like confused *nebulæ*. Stretching out to the distant suburbs, and all around the horizon, there was a swarm of gas jets and lighted windows, filling the distant parts of the city, as it were, with a dust of those myriads of suns, those planetary atoms that the human eye cannot discover. The edifices had disappeared, not a cresset was attached to their masts. At moments one might have believed one's self at some giant feast, in an illuminated cyclopean monument, with its stairways, balustrades, windows, fronts, terraces, its world of stone, whose strange and vast architecture was traced by lines of lamps bright with phosphorescent gleams. But there was always a return to the idea that constellations were continuing to come into being, that the heavens were continually broadening.

Hélène, following the priest's sweeping gesture, had looked lingeringly over lighted Paris. Here

too, she was ignorant of the names of its stars. Willingly would she have enquired as to that bright glimmer far below, to the left, which she looked at every evening. Others interested her. There were some that she loved, whilst certain of them made her restless and uneasy.

"Father," she said, using for the first time that expression of tenderness and respect, "let me live —— It is the beauty of this night that is agitating me —— You are mistaken, you could not give me consolation now, for you cannot understand me."

The priest extended his arms, then slowly dropped them with an appearance of resignation. And after a pause he spoke in a low voice :

"Without doubt it must be so —— You implore aid, and you do not accept salvation. What despairing confessions I have received, and what tears I have not been able to check! —— Listen, my daughter, promise me a single thing: if ever life becomes too heavy for you, think that an honest man loves you and that he is waiting for

you —— You will only have to put your hand in his to enjoy peace again."

"I promise you," Hélène answered seriously.

And as she made this promise, light laughter was heard in the room. It was Jeanne, who had just awoke and who was looking at her doll walking on the table. Monsieur Rambaud, delighted with his mending, was still holding out his hands for fear of some accident. But the doll was solid; it stamped its little heels, it turned its head, uttering at each step the same words with the squeaking voice of a hen-parrot.

"Oh! —— it is a trick! ——" murmured Jeanne, still drowsy. "What have you done to it, tell me? It was broken, and there it is in movement —— Give it to me a while, let me see —— You are too kind ——"

Meanwhile, over Paris ablaze, a luminous cloud was rising. One would have said it was the ruddy breath of a furnace. At first, it seemed like a pale shadow in the night, a scarcely perceptible reflection. Then gradually, in proportion as the evening advanced, it became blood red; and,

suspended in the air, motionless above the city, made up of all the flames and of all the rumbling life that it breathed, it looked like one of those clouds of lightning and flame that crown the crater of volcanoes.

I

They had passed the finger-bowls round and the ladies were delicately wiping their fingers. There was a moment's silence around the table. Madame Deberle glanced around to see if everybody had finished; then she arose without speaking, whilst her guests imitated her, amid a rattle of chairs. An old gentleman, who was on her right, had hastened to offer his arm.

"No, no," she murmured, while leading him herself towards a door. "We will have coffee in the small salon."

The guests followed her in couples. At the end came two ladies and two gentlemen, who were continuing a conversation, without dreaming of joining the line. But, in the little salon, all embarrassment disappeared, and the gayety of the dessert reappeared. The coffee was already served

on a huge lacquer tray on a table. Madame Deberle moved about with the kind manner of a hostess who is anxious about the varied tastes of her guests. But in truth it was Pauline who was most fussy and who reserved to herself the duty of waiting on the gentlemen. There were a dozen persons present, about the regulation number that the Deberles invited every Wednesday, beginning in December. In the evening, about ten o'clock, many others came.

"Monsieur de Guiraud, a cup of coffee," said Pauline, stopping in front of a bald little man. "Ah! no, I know, you do not take it — A glass of Chartreuse, then?"

But she got confused as to her service and brought a glass of cognac. Radiant with smiles, she made the round of the guests, calm and assured, looking folks straight in the eyes, moving around easily in her long train. She wore a superb white India cashmere dress, trimmed with swansdown, and cut square at the bosom. When all the men were standing, cup in hand, and sipping with chin elevated, she attacked a tall young

man, Tissot junior, whom she thought good-looking.

Hélène had not partaken of coffee. She had sat apart, her look expressed some weariness, and clad in a black velvet dress, without trimming, her appearance was austere. Smoking was going on in the little salon and the cigar-boxes were near her, on a console table. The doctor approached, and while choosing a cigar, asked her:

“Jeanne is well?”

“Very well,” she replied. “We have been to the Bois to-day, she played like a madcap — Oh! she must be asleep at this hour.”

Both were chatting amicably, with the smiling familiarity of people who see each other every day. But Madame Deberle’s voice rang out:

“Here, Madame Grandjean can tell you — Is it not true that I returned from Trouville about the 10th of September? It was raining and the beach was unendurable.”

Three or four ladies were around her, while she talked of her stay at the seashore. Hélène had to rise and join the group.

"We spent a month at Dinard," said Madame de Chermette. "Oh! a delightful country, charming people!"

"There was a garden behind the chalet, then a terrace facing the sea," Madame Deberle continued. "You know that I decided to take my landau and my coachman — It is much more convenient for driving — But Madame Levasseur came to see us —"

"Yes, one Sunday," said the latter; "We were at Cabourg — Oh! you had a very delightful establishment, although a little dear, I think —"

"By the way," interrupted Madame Berthier, addressing Juliette, "didn't Monsieur Malignon teach you how to swim?"

Hélène noticed a look of embarrassment on Madame Deberle's countenance, a sudden vexation. Several times already she had believed that Malignon's name, unexpectedly mentioned in her presence, vexed her. But the young woman's composure was restored.

"A fine swimmer! —" she exclaimed. "If ever that man gives lessons to any one! —"

For myself, I am frightfully afraid of cold water. The mere sight of people bathing makes me shiver."

She trembled coquettishly, raising her plump shoulders like a wet bird shaking itself.

"Then, it is a myth?" said Madame de Guiraud.

"Yes, most assuredly. I wager that it was he who invented it. He detests me since he spent a month down there with us."

Guests began to arrive. The ladies, with bunches of flowers in their hair, and well-rounded arms, were smiling and nodding; the men, in evening dress, hat in hand, bowed and sought some trite phrase. Madame Deberle, chatting all the time, extended the tips of her fingers to the habitués of her house; and many, without saying anything, bowed and passed on. Mademoiselle Aurélie had just entered. She immediately went into ecstasies over Juliette's dress, which was of marine-blue stamped velvet, with faille silk trimming. Thereupon, the ladies appeared to notice only the gown. Oh! it was lovely, really lovely! It came from Worms's. They chatted about it for five minutes. The coffee

finished, the guests had laid down the empty cups, some here, some there, on the tray, on the console table; the old gentleman was the only one who did not finish his, as he stopped at each sip to chat with a lady. The room was filled with a warm odor, the aroma of the coffee rising, mingled with the light perfume of the toilets.

"You know that I have had nothing," said Tissot junior to Pauline, who was talking to him of an artist to whose house her father had taken her to see some paintings.

"What! you have had nothing? — Why, I brought you a cup of coffee."

"No, mademoiselle, I assure you."

"But I most certainly want you to have something — Wait, here is some Chartreuse!"

Madame Deberle had attracted her husband by a significant nod. The doctor understood, opened himself the door of the large salon, into which they passed, while a servant took away the tray. The vast room was chilly, and was lighted by six lamps and a lustre with ten candles which diffused a bright white light. Some ladies were already

there, arranged in a circle in front of the fireplace; but there were only two or three men standing within the sweep of the spreading skirts. And through the open door of the reseda salon one heard Pauline's shrill voice, she having remained alone with Tissot junior.

"Now that I have poured it out, you are certainly going to drink it — What would you have me do with it? — Pierre has taken the waiter away."

Then they saw her appear, all white, in her dress trimmed with swansdown. She announced, with a smile that showed her teeth between her fresh lips:

"Here is the handsome Malignon."

Handshaking and bowing continued. Monsieur Deberle had taken his place near the door. Madame Deberle, seated in the midst of the ladies on a very low upholstered stool, rose every moment. When Malignon presented himself, she affected to turn her head. He was very correctly dressed, his hair, which was curled with a small iron, was parted down to his nape. On the threshold he had adjusted a monocle to his right eye,

with a slight grimace, "entirely chic," as Pauline said; and he threw a glance around the parlor. He pressed the doctor's hand carelessly without saying anything, then advanced towards Madame Deberle, in front of whom he bent his tall figure, squeezed in his black coat.

"Ah! it is you," she said in a tone to be heard. "It appears that you swim now."

He did not understand, but he answered all the same, trying to be witty:

"Certainly —— One day I saved a Newfoundland dog that was drowning."

The ladies thought that charming. Madame Deberle herself seemed disarmed.

"I consent to Newfoundlands," she answered. "But you know that I did not bathe even once at Trouville."

"Ah! the lesson that I gave you!" he exclaimed. "Well! didn't I tell you, one evening, in the dining-room, that it was necessary to move both feet and hands?"

All the ladies commenced to laugh. It was delightful. Juliette shrugged her shoulders. One

could not talk seriously with him. And she arose to go to meet a lady who was a very talented pianist, and who came to her house for the first time. Hélène, seated near the fire in undisturbed calm, looked on and listened. Malignon especially seemed to interest her. She had seen a studied movement on his part to get close to Madame Deberle, whom she heard chatting behind her arm-chair. All of a sudden, the tone of their voices changed. She leaned back in order to hear better. Malignon asked:

"Why did you not come yesterday? I waited for you until six o'clock."

"Leave me, you are mad," Juliette murmured.

Then Malignon lisped in a louder tone:

"Ah! you do not believe the story of my Newfoundland. But I received a medal, I will show it to you."

And he added in a whisper:

"You promised me —— Remember ——"

An entire family arrived and Madame Deberle greeted them with effusive compliments, whilst Malignon reappeared in the midst of the ladies,

his monocle in his eye. Hélène was quite pale from the hurried words that she had just overheard. It was like a thunderbolt to her, something unexpected and frightful. How could she betray her husband, that woman who was so happy, whose countenance wore so calm an expression, whose cheeks had all the freshness of a white rose? She had always known her to be giddy and to show a trace of amiable egotism that guarded her against the troubles of a stupid act. And then with such a creature as Malignon! The afternoons in the garden suddenly recurred to her mind, Juliette smiling and loving as the doctor kissed her head. They loved each other, nevertheless. A sentiment that she could not define filled her with wrath against Juliette, as if she had just been personally deceived. She felt humiliated for Henri's sake, a jealous wrath possessed her, her suffering was so plainly depicted on her face that Mademoiselle Aurélie asked her:

“What is the matter with you? — Are you suffering?”

The old maid had sat down beside her, on observing that she was alone. She displayed a friendly interest in her, delighted with the complacent manner in which that grave and beautiful woman listened for hours to her gossip.

But Hélène did not answer. She must see Henri, must know immediately what he was doing, how he looked. She rose, searched for him in the salon, and at last found him. He stood chatting with a stout, pale man, he was quite calm and looked contented, his face beaming with his usual pleasant smile. For a moment she scrutinized him. She felt a pity for him that dwarfed him a little, yet at the same time she loved him more, with a tenderness that included a vague idea of protection. Her sentiment, albeit quite confused, suggested that she ought at that hour to compensate him for his lost happiness.

"Ah, well!" murmured Mademoiselle Aurélie, "it is going to be lively if Madame de Guiraud's sister sings — It is the tenth time that I have heard *Les Tourterelles*. That is her stock piece this winter — You know that she is separated

from her husband. Look at that dark gentleman, down there, near the door. They are on the best of terms. Juliette is obliged to receive him, otherwise she would not come ——”

“Ah!” said Hélène.

Madame Deberle animatedly went from group to group, entreating silence in order to hear Madame de Guiraud’s sister. The salon was filled, about thirty ladies were sitting in the centre, whispering and laughing; two, however, remained standing, chatting in a louder tone, and shrugging their shoulders with a dainty motion; whilst five or six men, quite at ease, seemed entirely at home among them and almost hidden by their skirts. A cautionary “Hush” was heard, the sound of voices faded, and the faces assumed a settled and bored expression; and only the waving of the fans was audible in the warm atmosphere.

Madame de Guiraud’s sister was singing, but Hélène was not listening. She was now watching Malignon, who pretended to enjoy *Les Tourterelles* while affecting an extraordinary love of music.

Was it possible! that fellow! without a doubt, at Trouville they had played some dangerous game. The words heard by H  l  ne seemed to indicate that Juliette had not yet yielded; but the fall seemed at hand. Before her, Malignon marked the time with a swaying motion as if enraptured; Madame Deberle's expression was one of admiring complacency, whilst the doctor was silent and agreeable, patiently waiting for the conclusion of the song in order to resume his conversation with the big, pale man.

When the singer ceased, faint applause was heard, some voices feebly uttered:

"Delightful! charming!"

But the handsome Malignon, stretching out his arms over the ladies' heads, clapped his gloved hands, but without making any sound, repeating: "Bravo! bravo!" in a high-pitched voice that dominated the others.

Immediately afterwards, the enthusiasm died out, the tense faces yielded to smiles, and some ladies arose, while the sense of a general relief let loose the flood of conversation. The warmth increased,

an odor of musk from the toilets was circulated by the waving fans. At moments, above the buzz of the chatter, a pearly laugh was heard, or a word spoken in a loud voice would cause a general turning of heads. Already, Juliette had gone thrice into the salon to entreat the men who had taken refuge there not to neglect the ladies thus. They followed her; but ten minutes later they had again disappeared.

"It is insufferable," she murmured in an angry tone, "one cannot keep one of them."

Meanwhile Mademoiselle Aurélie was individually naming the ladies to Hélène, for this was only the second soirée she had attended at the doctor's. There were present the entire upper middle class of Passy, very wealthy people. Then, leaning over :

"Certainly, it is a fact — Madame de Chermette is marrying her daughter to that tall, fair man whom she has stuck to for eighteen months — At least, there is one mother-in-law who will love her son-in-law."

But she suddenly stopped, quite surprised, and exclaimed :

"See! Madame Levasseur's husband is chatting with his wife's lover! — And yet Juliette had sworn never again to receive them here together."

Hélène slowly glanced around the salon. In such seemingly worthy and virtuous middle-class society, was it possible that there were only culpable women? Her provincial severity was astonished at the promiscuousness tolerated in Parisian society. She railed at herself bitterly for having suffered so much, when Juliette put her hand in hers. Truly! she was very stupid to be so extremely scrupulous. Adultery was there in middle-class airs with a sanctimonious manner and intensified by a touch of coquettish refinement. Madame Deberle again seemed at ease with Malignon; and delicately curling herself up in an arm-chair, she displayed her plumpness of a pretty and delicate brunette, laughing at his witty remarks. Monsieur Deberle, happening to pass, asked:

"You are not quarreling this evening, then?"

"No," Juliette replied quite merrily. "He is saying too many stupid things — If you knew all the nonsense that he has told us —"

There was more singing, but it was with greater difficulty that silence was obtained. Tissot junior was singing a duo from *La Favorita* with a lady of well-matured beauty whose hair was dressed in juvenile style. Pauline, who was standing at one of the doors, among the black coats, was looking at the singer with an air of candid admiration, such as she had seen when works of art were being scrutinized.

"Oh! what a fine face!" she unintentionally uttered, during a phrase drowned by the accompaniment, and so loud that the whole salon heard it.

The evening was advancing, and the countenances of the guests betrayed weariness. Ladies who had sat for three hours in the same arm-chair, unconsciously declared their weariness by their looks, happy, moreover, to become weary here. In the interval between the selections, which were only half listened to, the conversation was resumed, and it seemed like the still sounding echoes of the piano. Monsieur Letellier related that he had gone to Lyons to inspect

some silk that he had ordered; and that he had been much impressed by the fact that the waters of the Saône did not mingle with those of the Rhône. Monsieur de Guiraud, a magistrate, delivered himself of some sententious phrases as to the necessity of damming up vice at Paris. A group encircled a gentleman who knew a Chinaman and who gave them details about him. In a corner, two ladies were exchanging confidences about their servants. In the group of women among whom Malignon was enthroned, they were discussing literature: Madame Tissot declared Balzac to be unreasonable; Malignon did not deny it, only remarking that Balzac had, at long intervals, a well-written page.

“A little silence!” Pauline exclaimed. “She is going to play.”

It was the pianist, the very talented lady. All heads were turned toward her as a matter of politeness. But, in the midst of the calm, men’s loud voices were heard discussing in the small salon. Madame Deberle seemed in despair. She became infinitely miserable.

"They are pests," she murmured. "Let them stay there, since they do not want to come; but, at least, they should keep quiet!"

She accordingly sent Pauline, who, with great delight, ran to deliver her message.

"You should know, gentlemen, that there is going to be music," she said with the calm hardihood of a maiden in her queenly robe: "You are asked to be silent."

She spoke in a high key, her voice being very shrill. And, as she remained there with the men, laughing and joking, the noise grew much louder. The discussion continued, she suggested arguments. In the salon, Madame Deberle was on the rack. Moreover, the guests had had enough music and they remained unmoved. The pianist sat down again, biting her lips, in spite of the profuse compliments that the mistress of the house thought it her duty to pay her.

Hélène was suffering. Henri did not seem to see her. He had not approached her again. At intervals, he smiled at her from afar. Early in the evening she had felt comforted by his prudent





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conduct. But, since she knew the history of the other two, she would have wished something, she did not know precisely what, some mark of tenderness, that she might equally enjoy notice even at the risk of being compromised. She was troubled with a vague longing blended with a multitude of evil thoughts. Did he no longer love her, that he could thus remain so indifferent? Assuredly, he was choosing his time. Ah! if she had been able to speak unreservedly to him, to tell him of the unworthiness of that woman who bore his name! Then, whilst the piano was grinding out short, lively airs, she was dreaming, musing in her imagination: Henri had driven Juliette away, and she was with him as his wife in far-off countries whose language was unknown to them.

A voice startled her.

"Don't you take anything?" Pauline asked.

The salon was empty. They had just passed into the dining-room for tea. Hélène arose with difficulty. Her head was swimming with confused thoughts. She fancied that she had dreamt

it all, the words heard, Juliette's approaching fall, that bourgeois adulterer, smiling and calm. If all that were true, Henri would be beside her, and both would already have left that house.

"Surely, you will take a cup of tea?"

She smiled and thanked Madame Deberle, who had kept a place for her at the table. Plates of pastry and sweetmeats covered the tablecloth, whilst a large brioche and two cakes arranged symmetrically on compotiers stood out conspicuously; and, as the space was limited, the teacups almost touched one another, separated in pairs by narrow gray napkins with long fringes. The ladies only were seated. From the tips of their ungloved fingers they were eating small cakes and preserved fruits, passing the cream-jugs to one another, daintily pouring it out themselves. However, three or four had sacrificed themselves and were waiting on the men. The latter, ranged along the walls, were drinking, while taking all manner of precautions to protect themselves against accidental jostlings. Others, remaining in the two salons, were waiting until the cakes reached them.

This was the hour of Pauline's triumph. They were chatting more loudly now, laughter and the ringing sound of silverware resounded, and the odor of musk was intensified by the mingling of the penetrating aroma of the tea.

"Pass me the brioche, then," said Mademoiselle Aurélie, who found herself next to Hélène. "These sweetmeats are not substantial."

She had already emptied two plates. Then with her mouth full, she said:

"Some of the people are leaving — We are going to be comfortable now."

Some ladies left, in fact, after shaking hands with Madame Deberle. Many men had slipped away quietly. The apartments were becoming empty. Some gentlemen were thus able to sit down at the table. But Mademoiselle Aurélie did not leave her place. She greatly desired to have a glass of punch.

"I am going to get one for you," said Hélène, who rose.

"Oh! no, thank you — Do not take that trouble."

For a moment or two Hélène had been watching Malignon. He had gone to shake hands with the doctor, he was now bowing to Juliette on the threshold. Her face was white, her eyes bright, and, from her complacent smile, one might have thought that he was complimenting her in regard to her soirée. While Pierre was pouring out the punch on a buffet, near the door, Hélène advanced and manœuvred in such a way as to conceal herself behind the folds of the curtain. She listened.

"I implore you," said Malignon, "come the day after to-morrow —— I shall wait for you till three o'clock ——"

"You cannot surely be serious?" Madame Deberle answered, laughing. "What stupidities you utter!"

But he insisted, repeating:

"I will wait for you —— Come the day after to-morrow —— You know where?"

Then, she murmured hurriedly:

"Well, yes, the day after to-morrow."

Malignon bowed and left. Madame de Chermette left with Madame Tissot. Juliette, full of

animation, accompanied them into the anteroom, saying to the former, in her most amiable way:

“I will call on you the day after to-morrow —— I have a lot of visits on that day.”

Hélène remained motionless and very pale. Meanwhile, Pierre, who had poured out the punch, handed her the glass. She took it mechanically and bore it to Mademoiselle Aurélie, who was attacking the preserved fruits.

“Oh! you are too kind,” exclaimed the old maid. “I should have beckoned to Pierre —— You see, it is wrong not to offer punch to the ladies. At my age ——”

But she stopped, remarking Hélène’s paleness.

“You are certainly in pain —— Take a glass of punch.”

“Thank you, it is nothing —— The heat is so intense ——”

She staggered, returned to the deserted salon, and dropped into an arm-chair. The lamps were burning with a reddish blaze; the wax candles in the lustre, burnt very low, threatened to shatter the sockets. From the dining-room the adieus of

the last guests were audible. Hélène had forgotten all about leaving, she wanted to remain there to reflect. So it was not a dream, Juliette would go to that man's house. The day after to-morrow; she knew the day. Oh! she would no longer restrain her impulses, that was the cry that appealed from her innermost being. Then she thought that it was her duty to speak to Juliette, to turn her from her error. But that benign thought chilled her, and she banished it as being annoying. She was gazing earnestly at the fire in which the dying embers of a log crackled. The atmosphere was still heavy and oppressive from the perfumes of the toilets.

"Well! you are here," Juliette exclaimed as she entered. "Ah! it is good of you not to have gone at once — At last, one breathes!"

And as Hélène, who was surprised, appeared to be rising, Juliette continued:

"Wait, then, nothing is hurrying you — Henri, give me my vinaigrette."

Three or four persons remained, they were intimate friends. They sat down before the

smouldering fire and chatted with a charming freedom, surrounded by the drowsy influence that was settling upon the vast room. The doors were open, they saw the little salon empty, the dining-room empty, all the apartments still lighted and dominated by an undisturbed silence. Henri showed himself tenderly gallant toward his wife; he had just gone up to fetch from their room her vinaigrette, which she inhaled while gradually shutting her eyes; and he asked her if she was not too much fatigued. Yes, she felt a little tired; but she was delighted, everything had passed off so well. Then she related that, on the evenings when she received, she could not go to sleep, she was restless in bed until six o'clock in the morning. Henri smiled, and there was some fun. Hélène looked at them, and shivered from the benumbing effects of sleep which seemed gradually to overcome the entire house.

However, there were now only two persons present. Pierre had gone to get a carriage. Hélène was the last. One o'clock struck. Henri, no longer feeling restrained, got up and blew out

two candles in the lustre that were overheating the sockets. It seemed like retiring for the night, the lights extinguished one by one, and the room bathed in the darkness of an alcove.

"I am keeping you from going to bed," H  l  ne stammered as she suddenly arose. "Send me away."

Her face grew very red, the mounting blood choked her. They accompanied her to the hall. But there, as it was cold, the doctor was uneasy about his wife, whose neck was bare.

"Go in, you will be ill — You are too warm."

"Well, adieu," said Juliette, who embraced H  l  ne, as she was accustomed to do in moments of tenderness. "Come and see me more frequently."

Henri had taken H  l  ne's fur cloak, and held it spread out to assist her in adjusting it. When she had slipped in both her arms, he turned up the collar, all the while smiling upon her as they stood in front of an immense glass that covered one wall of the hall. They were alone,

they saw each other in the mirror. Then, suddenly, without turning, wrapped up in her fur, she fell back into his arms. For three months past, they had only exchanged friendly handshakes; they desired to cease loving each other. His smile vanished; his countenance became impassioned and swelled with the intensity of his feeling. Pressing her madly to him, he kissed her on the neck. And she threw her head backward to return his kiss.

II

Hélène had not slept during the night. She tossed about feverishly, and when she lapsed into slumber, the same anguish again woke her with a start. In the nightmare of that half-sleep, she was tormented with a fixed idea, she wished to know the place of that meeting. It seemed to her that that knowledge would comfort her. It could not be at Malignon's little entresol, in the Rue Taitbout, of which they often spoke at the Deberles'. Where, then? where, then? And her brain labored in spite of her, and she forgot all else in her desire to plunge into that search, which exhausted her and filled her with secret desires.

When daylight appeared, she dressed herself, and caught herself saying aloud:

"It will be to-morrow."

With one stocking on, and her hands hanging listlessly at her side, she was now dreaming that it was perhaps in some furnished house, in an out-of-the-way room, rented by the month. Then, this supposition offended her. She pictured delightful apartments with heavy hangings, brightened by flowers, and large, bright fires burning on all the hearths. It was no longer Juliette and Malignon who were there, she fancied herself with Henri, in the recesses of that soft retreat, where no noises penetrated from without. She shivered in her loosely fastened dressing-gown. Where, then, was it? where, then?

“Good-day, little mother,” exclaimed Jeanne, who had awakened in her turn.

She was now again sleeping in the alcove, since she had recovered. Barefooted and in her chemise, she came, as every day, to throw herself on Hélène’s neck. Then she started off again at a run, and covered herself for a moment in her warm bed. That amused her, and she laughed under the clothes. A second time she repeated her antics.

“Good-day, little mother!”

And she bounded off once more. This time she laughed noisily, she had thrown the sheet over her head, and called out from under it, in a loud but muffled tone:

“I am not there —— I am not there ——”

But Héléne was not playful as on other mornings. Then Jeanne, weary, fell asleep again. It was still very early. About eight o'clock, Rosalie appeared to tell of her morning's work. Oh! a fine mess outside, she had almost left her shoes in the mire while going to get her milk. A genuine thaw; the air was mild too, it was stifling. Then suddenly something occurred to her: an old woman had come to see the lady the previous evening.

“There!” she exclaimed on hearing a ring, “I bet that's her!”

It was old dame Fétu, but very clean and stately, with a white cap, a new dress, and a tartan crossed on her breast. She still preserved her whimpering voice.

“My good lady, it is I, I have taken the liberty —— It is for something that I have to ask you ——”

Hélène looked at her, somewhat surprised at seeing her so substantially arrayed.

"You are better, mother Fétu?"

"Yes, yes, I am getting better, if one may say so — You know, I have always something very funny in my belly; it is beating me, but at any rate I am better — Then I have had a piece of luck. It astonished me, because you see, luck and I — A gentleman has entrusted me with his housekeeping. Oh! it is quite a history —"

Her words slackened, her small bright eyes moved restlessly amid the thousand wrinkles on her face. She seemed to wait for Hélène to question her. The latter, however, seated near the fire which Rosalie had just lighted, was listening only with a heedless ear, and her expression betrayed preoccupation and suffering.

"What have you to ask me, mother Fétu?" she said.

The old woman did not answer at once. She was examining the room, the violet-ebony furniture and the blue velvet hangings.

Then with the humble and fawning manner of a poor person, she murmured:

"Excuse me, madame, but your house is very lovely — My gentleman has a room like this, but his is pink — Oh! it is quite a history! Imagine to yourself a young man of good standing, who has come to rent apartments in our house. It is nothing to speak of, but on the second and third floors, the apartments in our house are very pleasant. And then, it is so quiet! not a carriage passes, one would think one was in the country — Then the workmen remained over a fortnight; they have made the bedroom a gem —"

She stopped, seeing that H  l  ne was becoming interested.

"It is for his work," she continued, with an increasing drawl; "he says that it is for his work — We have no janitor, you know. It is that that pleases him. He does not like janitors, that man, and he is certainly right —"

But she stopped again, as if a sudden idea had inspired her.

"Wait, then! you ought to know him, my gentleman ——, he visits one of your friends."

"Ah!" said Hélène, quite pale.

"Sure enough, the lady who lives next to you, with whom you went to church —— She came the other day."

Old woman Fétu's eyes contracted, as she closely watched the good lady's emotion. The latter made an effort to question her in a calm tone.

"She went up to his rooms?"

"No, she changed her mind, she had probably forgotten something —— But then, I was at the door. She asked me for Monsieur Vincent; then she huddled herself up again in her hack, calling to the driver: 'It is too late, turn back!' Oh! she is quite a lively lady, so genteel and very stylish. The good God doesn't place many like that on the earth. Besides yourself, there is only her —— May Heaven bless you all!"

And she ran on spinning out her empty phrases with the ease of a devotee well trained in counting her beads. Nevertheless she continued without any interruption the noiseless but expressive

twitching of the wrinkles of her face. It beamed with satisfaction now.

"Then," she resumed without transition, "I should very much like to have a pair of good shoes. My gentleman has been so good, I cannot ask him for them —— You see, I am dressed, but I ought to have a pair of good shoes. Mine are full of holes. Look, and in this muddy weather, one catches colic —— Believe me, I had colic yesterday, I was tortured in the afternoon —— With a pair of good shoes ——"

"I will bring you a pair, mother Fétu," said Hélène, as she dismissed her with a gesture.

Then, as the old woman was backing out with curtsies and thanks, she asked her:

"At what hour can you be found alone?"

"My gentleman is never there after six o'clock," she replied. "But do not give yourself that trouble, I will come myself, I will get the shoes at your janitor's —— But let it be as you wish. You are an angel from paradise. The good Lord will give it all back to you."

Even on the landing she continued her exclamations. Hélène remained seated, plunged in the stupor caused by the information that this woman had just conveyed to her, so strangely opportunely. She knew where, now. A pink room in that dilapidated old house! She again pictured the stairway with its oozing moisture, the yellow doors on each landing blackened by greasy hands, all that wretchedness that had excited her pity the preceding winter, when she went to visit mother Fétu; and she tried to picture the pink room, in the midst of those hideous evidences of poverty. While still plunged in a deep reverie, two warm little hands were placed on her eyes, red through lack of sleep, whilst a laughing voice asked:

“Who is it? —— Who is it? ——”

It was Jeanne, who had just dressed herself unaided. Old dame Fétu’s voice had awakened her; and, seeing that some one had shut the door of the alcove, she had hurried so as to take her mother by surprise.

“Who is it? —— Who is it? ——” she repeated, laughing with increasing mirth.

As Rosalie entered then, bringing breakfast, she said to her :

“ You know, do not speak —— Nobody is asking you anything.”

“ Have done then, you silly girl !” said H      .
“ I have no doubt that it is you.”

The child slipped to her mother’s knee, and there, throwing herself back, and swinging to and fro, happy in the enjoyment of her invention, she continued with a convinced air :

“ Indeed, it might have been another little girl —— Eh ! a little girl who brought you a letter from her mamma inviting you to dinner —— Then she might have covered your eyes ——”

“ Don’t play the simpleton,” H       continued, setting her on her feet. What are you saying ? ——
Serve the breakfast, Rosalie.”

But the housemaid was examining the child, and said that Mademoiselle had dressed herself oddly. In truth, in her haste, Jeanne had not even put on her shoes. She had a short flannel petticoat, through the opening of which a corner of her chemise appeared. Her unfastened swan-skin

jacket exposed her girlish figure, a flat chest of exquisite delicacy on which waved lines were traced with faint, rosy spots that marked the breasts. With her hair in disorder, and walking in her stockings that were put on inside out, she was adorable, all white in her linen put on in any fashion.

She leaned forward, looked at herself, then burst out laughing.

"I am pretty, mamma, see, then! —— Tell me, what do you want? I am going to remain like that —— It is pretty!"

Hélène, repressing a movement of impatience, asked her usual morning question:

"Is your face washed?"

"Oh! mamma," the child murmured, suddenly grieved, "oh! mamma, —— It is raining, it looks very ugly ——"

"Then you will have no breakfast —— Wash her face, Rosalie."

She usually attended to that duty herself. But she felt actually out of condition and drew close to the fire, shivering in spite of the fact that the

weather was very mild. Rosalie had just brought the table close to the fire-place, and had set a napkin and two white porcelain bowls on it. In front of the fire, the *café au lait* simmered in a silver pot, a present from Monsieur Rambaud. At that morning hour, the untidy room, still drowsy and crowded with the litter of the night, seemed very inviting.

"Mamma, mamma!" Jeanne exclaimed from the back of the alcove, "she is rubbing me too hard, it is taking my skin off! — Oh! my, my, how cold it is!"

Hélène, with her eyes fixed on the pot, was in a deep reverie. She wanted to know all, she would go. It irritated and troubled her to think of the mysterious meeting-place, in that filthy corner of Paris.

She considered the clandestine affair to be in very bad taste, and recognized in it Malignon's romantic imagination, his fancy to reproduce on a cheap scale the "*petites maisons*" of the Regency.

And yet, in spite of her repugnance, she was feverishly attracted, and her mind was occupied in

the contemplation of the silence and twilight of the pink room.

"Mademoiselle," Rosalie repeated, "if you do not let me do it, I shall call Madame ——"

"There! you are putting soap in my eyes," replied Jeanne, whose voice was choked with sobs. "I have had enough of it, let me go —— The ears will do until to-morrow."

But the trickling of the water continued, and the dripping from the sponge into the basin could be heard. There was the noise of a struggle. The child wept. Almost immediately after she reappeared, quite cheerful, calling :

"It is all over, it is all over ——"

She was quite rosy from the rubbing and of a freshness that smelt agreeable, her hair was still damp and she shook herself. In struggling her jacket had slipped off; her petticoat had become untied, and her stockings had slipped down, showing her slender legs. For once, as Rosalie said, Mademoiselle resembled an infant Jesus. But Jeanne was very proud of being clean; she did not want them to dress her again.

"Look a moment, mamma, look at my hands, and my neck, and my ears — Eh! let me warm myself, I am very comfortable — You will not say if I have merited my breakfast to-day."

She had coiled herself in front of the fire, in her little arm-chair. Then Rosalie poured out the *café au lait*. Jeanne took her bowl on her lap, soaking her toast gravely, with the airs of a grown-up person. Hélène usually forbade her to eat in that way. But she remained preoccupied. She left her bread and was satisfied with drinking the coffee. At the last mouthful, Jeanne was seized with remorse. Her heart was filled with grief, she put down the bowl and threw herself on her mother's neck, on seeing her pale face.

"Mamma, are you ill in your turn? — I have not caused you trouble, tell me?"

"No, my darling, on the contrary, you are very good," murmured Hélène, who embraced her. "But I am rather weary, I have slept badly — Pray, do not be uneasy."

She was thinking that the day would be terribly long. What was she going to do, while

waiting for night to come? For some time past, she had neglected her needle-work, it seemed to her excessively laborious. For hours, she remained seated in her room, her hands idle, almost smothering, and though feeling the need of enjoying the open air, yet never stirring. It was that room that was making her ill; she detested it, and was annoyed at having lived there two years; the thought of its blue velvet and its view of the sweeping expanse of a great city was hateful to her, her mind pictured a small tenement in some bustling street whose noises would have dazed her. My God! how slowly the hours passed! She took a book, but the fixed idea that throbbed in her brain continually evoked the same images between her eyes and the page she had begun.

Rosalie had meantime arranged the room, Jeanne's hair had been brushed and she was dressed. Then, in the midst of the orderly furniture, whilst her mother, sitting in front of the window, was trying to read, the child, who had one of her fits of boisterous mirth, began a great

game. She was all alone; but that did not trouble her, she played the parts for three or four persons, with an earnestness and dignity that were very comical. In the first place, she played the lady making a call. She disappeared in the dining-room; then, she came back bowing, smiling, and tossing her head in a very coquettish way.

“Good-day, madame —— How do you do, madame —— It is so long since I have seen you. It is wonderful, truly —— Dear me! I have suffered greatly, madame. Yes, I have had the cholera, it is very disagreeable —— Oh! it does not show at all, you grow younger, on my word of honor. And your children, madame? As for me, I have had three of them since last summer ——”

She continued her curtseying before the table, which doubtless represented the lady at whose house she was making a call. Then she drew the chairs closer together, and kept up a general conversation for an hour, with a most extraordinary abundance of phrases.

"Do not be so silly, Jeanne," said her mother from time to time, when the noise proved too much for her patience.

"But, mamma, I am at my friend's house — She is talking to me, and I must surely answer her — When one serves tea, people do not put cakes in their pockets, do they?"

And she rattled on again:

"Adieu, madame. Your tea was very delicious — Remember me kindly to your husband."

Then suddenly she changed her rôle. She was going out shopping in a carriage, she was to make some small purchases, and she mounted a chair astride like a boy.

"Jean, don't go so fast, I am afraid — Stop, then! we are in front of the milliner's — Mademoiselle, what is the price of this hat? Three hundred francs, it is not dear. But it is not pretty. I should like a bird on it, a big bird like that — Come, Jean, drive me to the grocer's. Have you no honey? Yes, madame, here is some. Oh! how good it is! but I don't want any of it; give me

two sous' worth of sugar — But do be careful, Jean! There, the carriage is upset! Officer, it was the cart that ran against us — You are not injured, madame? No, monsieur, not at all — Jean, Jean! now we will return. Gee-up! gee-up! Wait, I am going to order some chemises. Three dozen chemises for madame — I also want some laced boots and some corsets — Gee-up! Gee-up! Bless me! one will never finish!"

Then she fanned herself, and played the lady who returns home and scolds her servants. She did not pause for a moment; she was in a feverish excitement, her fantastic creations swarmed, the whole summary of life that seethed in her little brain was escaping piecemeal. Morning and afternoon she turned and twisted, danced and babbled; when she was tired, a stool, an umbrella that she spied in a corner, a rag picked up from the floor, sufficed to plunge her into another game, with new displays suggested by her inventive faculty. She created everything, personages, places, scenes; she amused herself as if she had with her twelve children of her own age.

At last night came. Six o'clock was about to strike. Hélène, arousing herself from the uneasy torpor in which she had spent the afternoon, quickly threw a shawl over her shoulders.

"Are you going out, mamma?" Jeanne asked in astonishment.

"Yes, my darling, only for a run in the quarter. I will not stay long — Be good."

Outside, the thaw continued. A stream of mud was flowing on the pavements. Hélène entered a shoe store on Rue de Passy, to which she had already taken old mother Fétu. Then she returned through the Rue Raynouard. The sky was gray, a mist was rising from the pavement. The street was lost to view in front of her, deserted and disquieting, in spite of the fact that it was still early, and the infrequent gas lamps showed like yellow spots in the damp fog. She hastened her step, keeping close to the houses, and shrinking from observation as if she were going to an assignation. But when she turned suddenly into the Passage des Eaux, she stopped under the arch, seized with genuine fear. The passage opened under her feet,

like a black hole. She could not see to its bottom, she perceived only, in the middle of that dark tunnel, the trembling glimmer of the one street-lamp that was lighted. Finally she decided, and took hold of the iron railing so as not to fall. With the tip of her shoes she felt for the broad steps. On each side the walls seemed brought close together and immeasurably lengthened by the darkness, whilst the stripped branches of the trees overhead vaguely outlined gigantic arms, with outstretched or clasped hands. She trembled with fear at the thought that the door of one of the gardens might open and a man spring upon her. No one passed, she went down as quickly as possible. All of a sudden, a shadow emerged from the darkness; a shiver chilled her when the shadow coughed; it was an old woman who was ascending with difficulty. Then she felt reassured, and raised her dress as carefully as possible, for it was dragging in the mire. The mud was so thick that her boots stuck to the steps. When she reached the bottom, she turned with an instinctive movement. The moisture from the branches was

dripping to the passage, the street-lamp glimmered like a miner's lamp, fastened to the edge of a pit made dangerous by infiltrations.

Hélène went up direct to the garret that she had so often visited, at the top of the large house of the passage. But it was useless for her to knock, nothing stirred. She then went down again, very much disturbed. Old mother Fétu was no doubt in the apartments on the second floor. Hélène dared not present herself there, however. She remained five minutes in the entry, which was lighted by a petroleum lamp. She went up again, paused and examined the doors; she was going away, when the old woman leaned over the balustrade.

"What, you are on the stairway, my good lady!" she exclaimed. "But come in, then! do not stay there and get sick —— Oh! it is treacherous, a perfect death-trap ——"

"No, thanks," said Hélène, "here is your pair of shoes, mother Fétu ——"

And she looked at the door that old dame Fétu had left open behind her. The corner of a stove was visible within.

"I am all alone, I swear to you," repeated the old woman. "Come in —— The kitchen is this way —— Ah! you are not proud with poor folks. That one can certainly say ——"

Then, despite her repugnance, ashamed of what she was doing there, Hélène followed her.

"Here is your pair of shoes, mother Fétu ——"

"Oh! my! how can I thank you? —— Oh! the beautiful shoes! —— Wait, I am going to put them on. It is exactly my foot, it goes on like a glove —— That is something like it! at least one can walk with these without being afraid of the rain —— You preserve me, you lengthen my life ten years, good lady —— It is not flattery, it is what I think, as true as there is a lamp there giving us light. No, I am not a flatterer ——"

She became affected as she spoke and had taken Hélène's hands and kissed them. Some wine was being warmed in a saucepan: on the table, near the lamp, a half-empty bottle of Bordeaux stretched out its slender neck. Moreover, there were there only four plates, a glass, two skillets, a stewing pot. One realized that old

dame Fétu was camping in that bachelor's kitchen, and that its stoves were lighted only for herself. On seeing Hélène's eyes directed towards the saucepan, she coughed, and assumed a doleful expression.

"It catches me in the belly," she groaned. "It is all very fine for the doctor to talk, I must have a worm —— Then a drop of wine makes me all right —— I am very much afflicted, my good lady. I do not wish any one to suffer as I do, it is too bad —— I am coddling myself a little, now; when one has seen it under all forms, it is allowable to nurse one's self, is it not? —— I have had the luck to fall in with a very amiable gentleman. May Heaven bless him!"

And she put two big lumps of sugar in her wine. She was getting still fatter, her little eyes were almost hidden by her increasingly bloated face. Her movements were slower under the influence of her sanctimonious felicity. The ambition of her whole life seemed at last satisfied. She was born for this. As she locked her sugar away, Hélène caught a glimpse of some delicacies

that betrayed her gluttony, a pot of preserves, a package of biscuits, and even cigars stolen from the gentleman.

"Well! adieu, mother Fétu, I am going," she said.

But the old woman moved the saucepan aside to the corner of the stove, murmuring :

"Let it be, it is too warm, I will drink it in a little while — No, no, do not go out this way. I beg your pardon for having received you in the kitchen. Let us look around."

She had taken the lamp and had entered a narrow passage.

Hélène, whose heart was beating quickly, passed behind her. The passage was dilapidated and smoke-begrimed, and the damp oozed from its walls.

A door opened and she found herself treading on a thick carpet.

Dame Fétu had taken a few steps and stood in the middle of a shaded and silent room.

"Eh?" she said as she raised the lamp, "isn't it pretty."

There were two square rooms that communicated with each other by a folding-door whose leaves had been removed ; a portière now replaced them. Both were hung with the same rose cretonne, with Louis XV. medallions, and chubfaced Cupids disporting among garlands of flowers. In the first room, there were a table, two couches, and some arm-chairs ; in the second, a smaller one, an immense bed filled the entire space. Dame Fétu called attention to the crystal night-lamp, suspended from the ceiling by gilded chains. That night-lamp was in her eyes the crowning point of luxury. Then she entered into explanations.

“You cannot imagine what a droll fellow he is. He lights it up at noon, he stays there to smoke a cigar, while looking vacantly about him — He amuses himself in this way, it seems — No matter, all this must have cost him a lot of money !”

Hélène, without speaking, went through the rooms. She found them in bad taste. There was too much red, the bed was too large, the furniture too new. One felt there was a straining

after seductive effects that was offensive in its display. A milliner would have succumbed at once.

Meantime, Héléne was being gradually overcome by a painful agitation, but the old woman gabbled on, while blinking her eyes :

"He calls himself Monsieur Vincent —— I don't care, it is all the same to me. Since he pays, that young man ——"

"Good-bye, mother Fétu," repeated Héléne, who felt herself smothering.

She wanted to get away, and opening a door found herself in a suite of three small rooms whose bare and squalid appearance filled her with disgust. The paper on the wall was in tatters, the ceilings were black, and the loose tiles were strewn with patches of plaster. An odor of ancient poverty pervaded the atmosphere.

"Not that way, not that way!" old woman Fétu cried out. "Ordinarily, this door is kept shut —— They are the other rooms that he has not yet put in order. Bless me! it had already cost him dear enough —— Ah! they are not so pretty, for sure —— This way, my good lady, this way——"

And when H  l  ne had returned to the boudoir with the rose hangings, she stopped her to kiss her hand again.

“Come, I am not ungrateful — I shall always remember those shoes. How they fit me, and how warm they are, and how easily I could walk nine miles with them! — What, then, ought I to ask of the good Lord for you? O my God! hear me, make her the happiest of women! You who read in my heart, You know what I wish her. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen!”

A pious enthusiasm had suddenly taken possession of her, she made the sign of the cross again and again, and she bent her knee while looking to the large bed and to the crystal night-lamp. Then, opening the door that led to the landing, she whispered in H  l  ne’s ear, with a changed voice:

“When you wish, knock at the kitchen; I am always there.”

Stupefied, and looking behind her as if she were leaving a suspected place, H  l  ne went down the stairs, reascended the Passage des Eaux, and

found herself in the Rue Vineuse, quite unconscious as to the course she had followed. Even there, the old woman's last words bewildered her.

No indeed, she would never set foot in that house again. Never again would she take her gifts of charity there. Why, then, should she have knocked at the kitchen? At present she was satisfied, for she had seen. And she felt a contempt for herself and for the others. What a mean thing to have gone there! The image of the two rooms, with their cretonne, was incessantly reappearing before her eyes; with a glance she had embraced their most minute details, even to the place occupied by the seats and the folds of the curtains that draped the bed. But this image was always immediately followed by that of the three other small, dirty rooms, empty and abandoned; and that vision, those filthy walls concealed under the chubby Cupids, stirred her with both anger and disgust.

"Ah, well! madame," exclaimed Rosalie, who was watching for her on the stairway, "the dinner will be fine. For half an hour everything has been burning!"

At table, Jeanne pestered her mother with questions. Where had she been? what had she done?

She received only short answers, however, and amused herself by entertaining her doll at dinner. The latter was perched near her, on a chair. In a sisterly spirit she passed it half of her dessert.

"Above all, mademoiselle, eat in a proper way — Wipe your mouth, now — Oh! the dirty little creature, she does not even know how to use her napkin — There, you are pretty — See, here is a biscuit. What do you say? You want preserve on it? — Eh! it is better as it is — Let me peel your quarter of an apple —"

She laid the doll's share on the chair. But when her plate was empty, she again took up the delicacies one by one, and ate them, while speaking for the doll.

"Oh! it is delicious! — Never have I eaten such good preserves. Where did you get that preserve, madame? I will tell my husband to get a pot of it — Do you get those fine apples from your garden, madame?"

She fell asleep playing, she tumbled into the bedroom with her doll in her arms. Since morning she had not stopped. Her little legs could support her no longer, the fatigue of play had completely exhausted her; in her sleep she still laughed, she must have been dreaming that she was still playing. Her mother put her to bed, helpless, yielding, while she was playing some great game with the angels.

Hélène was at last alone in the room. She shut herself in, and sitting near the dead fire, she spent a frightful evening. Her will was ebbing from her, thoughts that she could not express were silently stirring her. It seemed to her that she heard the voice of an unknown wicked and sensual woman whose sovereign word she must obey. When the midnight hour struck, she lay down wearily. In bed, her torments became intolerable. She was half-asleep, turning about as if on live coals. Forms, which her sleeplessness enlarged, pursued her. Then an idea took possession of her mind. It was useless for her to strive to banish it, it took deeper root, clutched her by the throat, as

it were, and entirely subjected her. About two o'clock, she arose with the inflexible but vague determination of a somnambulist, lighted her lamp once more and wrote a letter in a disguised hand. It was a vague denunciation, a note of three lines without explanation or signature, and entreating Doctor Deberle to betake himself, that very day, to such a place, at such an hour. She sealed the envelope, put the letter in the pocket of her dress, which she had thrown on an arm-chair. Then, going to bed, she fell asleep at once, resting in a breathless state, lost to everything in a leaden sleep.

III

Next day, Rosalie could not serve the *café au lait* until about nine o'clock. Hélène had not risen until late, and then only with extreme weariness, and quite pale from the oppressive nightmare that had haunted her. She searched the pocket of her dress, found the letter, replaced it and came and sat down in front of the table without uttering a word. Jeanne's head was also heavy and her countenance was dull and agitated. She reluctantly left her little bed, not having the heart for play that morning. The sky was the color of soot, a dull light saddened the room, whilst from time to time, sudden showers lashed the window-panes.

"Mademoiselle is in the dumps," said Rosalie, who did all the talking. "She cannot be in a bright mood two days in succession. That's what it is to have romped so much yesterday!"

"Are you ill, Jeanne?" H  l  ne asked.

"No, mamma," replied the little one. "It is that wretched sky."

H  l  ne relapsed into silence. She finished her coffee, remained there absorbed, with her eyes fixed on the flame. On rising, she had considered that her duty commanded her to speak to Juliette, to induce her to abandon the meeting of the afternoon. How? That she did not know; but the necessity of so doing had all of a sudden impressed her, and now her mind was engrossed with the single thought of making the attempt. Ten o'clock struck, she dressed. Jeanne looked at her. When she saw her take her hat, she clasped her little hands, as if she felt cold, whilst her suffering cast a shadow over her countenance. Usually, she very clearly manifested her dislike of her mother's leaving her, not wanting to be away from her and demanding to go everywhere with her.

"Rosalie," said H  l  ne, "finish tidying the room quickly — Do not go out. I will return in an instant."

She stooped and kissed Jeanne hurriedly, without observing her grief. As soon as she had gone, the child's dignity, which had enabled her to repress her feelings, failed her, and a pent-up sob broke forth.

"Oh! how naughty it is, mademoiselle!" the housemaid repeated by way of consolation. "Gracious! no one will steal your mamma from you. You really must let her attend to her affairs — You cannot be always tied to her petticoats."

Meanwhile, Hélène had turned the corner of the Rue Vineuse, creeping close to the walls to protect herself from a shower. It was Pierre who admitted her; but he seemed embarrassed.

"Is Madame Deberle at home?"

"Yes, madame, but I do not know —"

Hélène, as an intimate friend, was making her way to the salon, but he took it upon himself to stop her.

"Wait, madame, I will go and see."

He slipped into the room, opening the door as little as possible, and Juliette's voice was heard speaking in angry tones.

"What, you have let some one in. I had expressly forbidden you — It is incredible! one cannot be at peace for a minute."

Hélène pushed open the door, resolved to carry out what she conceived to be her duty.

"So it is you!" said Juliette, on perceiving her. "I did not quite hear —"

But she maintained an air of vexation. Evidently, the visitor inconvenienced her.

"Do I disturb you?" asked the latter.

"No, no — You will soon understand. It is a surprise that we are getting up. We are rehearsing *Le Caprice*, so as to play it on one of my Wednesdays. We had purposely chosen the morning, so that no one could suspect it — Oh! stay, now. You will keep the secret, that is all."

Then, clapping her hands and addressing Madame Berthier, who was standing in the middle of the parlor, she continued, without taking any further notice of Hélène:

"Come, come, let us get to work — You do not give enough point to that phrase: 'to make

a purse unknown to one's husband would appear, in the eyes of many people, something more than romantic.' Repeat that."

Hélène, who was very much astonished at finding her thus occupied, sat down in the rear. They had pushed the seats and the tables over against the wall so that the carpet remained quite unencumbered. Madame Berthier, a delicate blonde, repeated her soliloquy, with her eyes raised to the ceiling in her efforts to remember her words; whilst the clever Madame de Guiraud, a beautiful brunette, who had taken upon herself the part of Madame de Léry, was waiting in an arm-chair for the signal to make her appearance. These ladies, in morning toilet, had not doffed their hats or their gloves. In front of them, Juliette, with De Musset's volume in her hand, her hair in disorder, enveloped in a loose white cashmere dressing-gown, assumed the masterful airs of a stage-manager who instructs the players as to the proper inflections of voice and by-play that should accompany the scenes. As the light was very poor, the small curtains of embroidered

tulle, raised and hooked to the knob of the sash fastening, permitted a view of the garden, which was shrouded in dark mist.

"You are not sufficiently emotional," Juliette declared. "Put more vigor into it, each word ought to tell. 'We are going, my dear little purse, to give the last touch to your toilet for you ——' Begin again."

"I shall be wretched," said Madame Berthier, languidly. "Why don't you take my place? —— You would make a delightful Mathilde."

"Oh! I, no —— In the first place, it requires a blonde. Moreover, I am a very good teacher, but not a good scholar —— Let us proceed, let us proceed."

Hélène remained in her corner. Madame Berthier, engrossed in her part, had not even turned. Madame de Guiraud had greeted her with a slight nod. She felt that she was out of place there, and that she should have refused to sit down. She was influenced to remain by no thought of a duty to be performed, but by a singular feeling, deep but vague, that she had sometimes hitherto experienced there. She was suffering from the

indifference manifested by Juliette's reception. The latter was exceedingly capricious in her friendships; she adored people for three months, threw herself on their necks and seemed to live only for them; then, some morning, without explanation, she seemed to have no knowledge of them. No doubt, in this as in all else, she yielded to a fashion, a desire to love those persons who were loved by those about her. These sudden outbursts of tenderness pained Hélène greatly, her noble and even spirit always dreamed of eternity. She had often left the Deberles' house very sad, burdened with a genuine despair at the thought of how little reliance could be placed on human affections. But on that day, in the crisis through which she was passing, she felt a still keener sorrow.

"We will omit the Chavigny scene," said Juliette. "He will not come this morning — Let us see Madame de Léry's part. It's your turn, Madame de Guiraud — This is your cue."

And she read :

" 'Imagine that I am showing him this purse —' "

Madame de Guiraud had got up. Speaking in a falsetto voice and assuming a silly air, she began :

“‘Oh! it is very pretty. Let me see it then.’”

When the servant had let her in, Hélène had pictured quite another scene. She expected to find Juliette nervous, very pale, trembling at the thought of the meeting, and while hesitating, yet drawn on; and she imagined herself entreating her to reflect, until the young woman, strangled with sobs, threw herself into her arms. Then that they had wept together, and Hélène had retired with the thought that Henri was henceforth lost to her, but that she had assured his happiness. But nothing of the sort; she had stumbled upon this rehearsal, of which she understood nothing; she found Juliette with a placid countenance, having certainly slept well and with her mind sufficiently calm to discuss Madame Berthier's poses, without being troubled in the least about what she might do in the afternoon. This indifference, this volatile conduct chilled Hélène, who came to the house fired with a burning passion.

She wanted to speak. She hazarded the question :

“Who is it plays the rôle of Chavigny?”

“Malignon,” said Juliette, turning round with an air of astonishment. “He played Chavigny all last winter — The annoying part of it is that we cannot have him at the rehearsals — Listen, ladies, I am going to read Chavigny’s part. Without that, we shall never get on.”

Thereafter she played the man’s part, deepening the tones of her voice unconsciously and assuming the cavalier airs that the situation prompted. Madame Berthier did the cooing, the plump Madame de Guiraud took infinite pains to be lively and witty. Pierre entered to put wood on the fire ; and, with a stealthy glance from under his eyebrows, he examined the ladies, whom he found very amusing.

But Hélène, still unshaken in her purpose, in spite of the weight she felt on her heart, tried to take Juliette aside.

“A minute only. I have something to tell you.”

"Oh! impossible, my dear —— You can see how busily I am engaged —— To-morrow, if you have time."

Hélène was silent. The young woman's unconcerned tone irritated her. She felt resentful on seeing her so calm, when she herself had suffered so much agony since the previous evening. For an instant, she was on the point of rising and letting things go. She was very foolish to desire to save that woman; her nightmare in its entirety was beginning again; her hand had just sought the letter in her pocket and was now pressing it with a feverish clasp. Why should she care for others, since others did not love her and did not suffer as she did?

"Oh! very good!" exclaimed Juliette, suddenly.

Madame Berthier was leaning her head on Madame de Guiraud's shoulder, sobbing and repeating :

" 'I am sure that he loves her, I am sure of it.' "

"You will be a furious success," said Juliette.
"Make a pause there, do you see? —— 'I am

sure that he loves her, I am sure of it ——' And let your head rest as it is. It is adorable —— Your turn, Madame de Guiraud."

"'No, my child, it cannot be; it is a caprice, a fancy ——,' " the stout lady declaimed.

"Perfect, but the scene is long, eh? let us rest for an instant —— We must carry that scene out in good form."

All three then discussed the arrangement of the salon. The dining-room door, to the left, would serve for the entrances and the exits; they would place an arm-chair at the right, a lounge at the lower end, and they would push the table close to the fire-place. Hélène, who had risen, was following them, as if she were interested in that arrangement. She had abandoned the plan of urging an explanation, and now merely wanted to make a last attempt to prevent Juliette from being at the rendezvous.

"I came," she said to her, "to ask you if it is not to-day that you purpose to call on Madame de Chermette."

"Yes, this afternoon."

"Then, if you allow me, I will come and take you, for I promised that lady long ago that I would go and see her."

Juliette was embarrassed for a second. But she recovered her composure immediately.

"Certainly, I should be very happy — Only, I have a lot of running about, I go first of all to some stores, and I do not really know at what hour I shall reach Madame de Chermette's."

"It makes no difference," H  l  ne continued ; "it will provide me with a walk."

"Listen, I can speak to you frankly — Well! do not insist, you would incommode me. Let it be next Monday."

This was said without a trace of emotion, so frankly, and with so tranquil a smile, that H  l  ne was abashed and made no further remark. She had to help Juliette, who wanted to bring the table near the fire-place at once. Then she drew back, whilst the rehearsal continued. After the end of the scene, Madame de Guiraud, in her soliloquy, uttered these two phrases with much force :

“‘But what an abyss, then, is man’s heart! Ah! on my faith, we are worth more than they!’”

What was Hélène to do now? The rage that this question stirred up within her prompted only confused thoughts of violence. She felt an irresistible desire to avenge herself for Juliette’s unassailable tranquillity, as if that serenity were an insult to the fever that was consuming her. She contemplated her fall, to see if she would always preserve the calm of her indifference. Then she despised herself for her own delicacy and scruples. Twenty times she should have said to Henri: “I love you, take me, let us go away,” and without a trembling, with the white and placid countenance of that woman who, three hours before a first meeting, was playing a comedy in her own house. At that very moment she was trembling more than the other; what maddened her was the consciousness of her passion in the midst of the smiling calm of that salon, the fear of breaking forth suddenly into passionate words. Was she a coward then?

A door was opened and at once she heard Henri’s voice saying:

"Do not disturb yourselves, I am only passing."

The rehearsal was about to end. Juliette, who was still reading Chavigny's part, had just seized Madame de Guiraud's hand.

"'Ernestine, I adore you!'" she exclaimed in an outburst of convincing energy.

"'Then you no longer love Madame de Blainville?'" Madame de Guiraud recited.

But Juliette refused to continue, as long as her husband was there. The men did not need to know about it. The doctor made himself very agreeable to the ladies; he complimented them, he foretold for them a great success. With black gloves on, and very proper with his clean-shaven face, he was returning from his visits. On arriving, he had merely saluted Hélène with a slight nod. He himself had seen a very great actress play the part of Madame de Léry at the Comédie Française; and he pointed out some of the by-play to Madame de Guiraud.

"At the moment that Chavigny is going to fall at your feet, you approach the fire-place, you throw the purse into the fire. Coolly, you see!

without any anger, like a woman who is feigning love ——”

“Good, good, leave us,” Juliette repeated. “We know all that.”

And when at last he pushed his office door open, she continued the scene:

“‘Ernestine, I adore you!’”

Henri, before leaving, had saluted H  l  ne as he did on entering. She had remained mute, expecting some catastrophe. This abrupt appearance of the husband seemed to her menacing. But when he had left, he appeared to her to be ridiculous, with all his politeness and blindness. He, too, was interested in that imbecile comedy! And there was no flash that lighted his glance when he saw her there! Then the whole house became hostile and chilling to her. It was a complete breaking up, nothing any longer held her, for she detested Henri as much as Juliette. At the bottom of her pocket, she had again clasped the letter between her clenched fingers. She stammered “au revoir” as she departed, feeling so giddy that the furniture seemed to dance

around her, while these words pronounced by Madame de Guiraud were resounding in her ringing ears :

“ ‘ Adieu. You think harshly of me perhaps to-day, but to-morrow you will feel some kindly sentiment toward me, and, believe me, that is better than a whim.’ ”

On the sidewalk, after Hélène had shut the door again, she drew forth the letter with a violent and somewhat mechanical movement, and slipped it into the box. Then she remained a few seconds dazed, watching the narrow copper plate that had fallen back in its place.

“ It is done,” she said in an undertone.

She pictured once more the two rooms hung with rose cretonne, the couches, the large bed ; Malignon and Juliette were there ; all of a sudden, the wall opened and the husband entered ; she knew no more and she was very calm. Instinctively she glanced about to see if any one had noticed her dropping in the letter. The street was empty. She turned the corner and went up to her home again.

"Have you been good, my darling?" she asked while embracing Jeanne.

The little one, seated in the same arm-chair, raised her pouting face. Without answering, she threw both her arms around her mother's neck, she kissed her, heaving a great sigh. She had been very much grieved.

At lunch, Rosalie was astonished.

"Madame must have had a long walk?"

"Why, so?" H  l  ne asked.

"Because madame eats with such an appetite — It is a long time since madame ate so heartily —"

It was true. She was very hungry, a sudden relief had brought with it the realization of an empty stomach. She felt within her an unspeakable peace and well-being. After the shocks of these last two days, she had become calm, peace had entered her soul, her limbs had become relaxed and supple as on emerging from a bath. She now experienced only the sensation of heaviness somewhere, an indefinable weight that was bearing her down.

When she re-entered the room, she at once looked at the clock, the hands of which then pointed to twenty-five minutes after twelve. Juliette's meeting was for three o'clock. Still two hours and a half distant. She made that calculation mechanically. Moreover, she was in no hurry, the hands were advancing, no one in the world now had the power to stop them; she allowed matters to take their course. For some time, a child's unfinished cap had been lying on the table. She took it up and commenced to sew in front of the window. The room was hushed in a deep silence. Jeanne had sat down in her accustomed place; but her hands hung listlessly beside her.

"Mamma," she said, "I cannot work, it does not amuse me."

"Well, my darling, do nothing — Stay, you shall thread my needles."

Then the child silently and slowly proceeded with the task. She carefully cut the ends of the thread even, spent an infinite time in finding the eye of the needle, and she got it ready only just

in time, her mother using one by one the threaded needles that she prepared for her.

"You see," she murmured, "I get on more quickly — This evening, my six little caps will be finished."

She turned to look at the clock. Ten minutes past one. Still nearly two hours. Juliette must be beginning to dress now. Henri had received the letter. Oh! certainly, he would go. The indications were precise, he would find the place at once. But all that seemed to her still very far off and she felt indifferent. She was sewing with regular stitches, and with the sedulous application of a workwoman. The minutes, one by one, were gliding away. Two o'clock struck.

A ring at the bell startled her.

"Who is it, then, little mother?" asked Jeanne, who had jumped on her chair.

As Monsieur Rambaud entered she said :

"It is you! — Why did you ring so loudly? You frightened me."

The good man seemed in consternation. In truth, he had been a little heavy-handed.

"I am not agreeable to-day, I am ill," the child continued. "I must not be frightened."

Monsieur Rambaud was very anxious about it. What ailed the little darling? And he did not take a seat until he felt reassured on perceiving H  l  ne make a slight sign to him, to warn him that the child was in the sulks, as Rosalie said. His daytime visits were rare, so he wanted to explain his visit at once. It was on behalf of a fellow-countryman, an old laborer who could no longer get work, because of his advanced years, and who had a paralytic wife, in a little room about large enough to turn one's hand in. One could not imagine such poverty. He had been up to their quarters that very morning in order to see for himself. A hole under the roof, with a skylight window, whose broken panes let the rain in; within, a straw mattress, a woman enveloped in an old curtain, and the man stupefied, crouched on the floor, not even having the courage to wield a broom.

"Oh! the poor unfortunates, the poor unfortunates!" H  l  ne repeated, moved to tears.

It was not the case of the old laborer that troubled Monsieur Rambaud. He would take him to his own house, and find a way to occupy him. But the woman, the paralytic whom her husband dared not leave alone for an instant and whom it was necessary to roll like a package, where could she be put, what was to be done with her?

"I thought of you," he continued, "you must get her at once into a hospital — I would have gone directly to Monsieur Deberle's, but I considered that you knew him better, that you would have more influence — If he will only interest himself about her, the matter can be arranged to-morrow."

Jeanne had listened, perhaps pale and trembling with pity.

She clasped her hands and murmured:

"Oh! mamma, be kind, get the poor woman admitted —"

"Why, certainly!" said Hélène, whose emotion was increasing. "As soon as I can, I will speak to the doctor, he will himself arrange the

preliminaries — Give me the names and the address, Monsieur Rambaud."

The latter wrote a note on the table.

Then, rising :

"It is twenty-five minutes of three," he said.
"You might perhaps find the doctor at home."

She had risen also, and looking at the clock, she started with a quiver that thrilled her whole body. It was indeed twenty-five minutes of three, and the hands were moving onward. Stammeringly, she said that the doctor must have gone out on his visits. Her looks were fixed on the clock. Meantime, Monsieur Rambaud, hat in hand, kept her standing and began his story again. Those poor people had sold everything, even their stove; and since the beginning of winter they had been without a fire day and night. At the close of December, they had been four days without food. Hélène uttered a cry of pain. The hands marked twenty minutes of three. Monsieur Rambaud took two full minutes more to leave.

"Well, I count on you," he said.

And stooping to embrace Jeanne, he added:

“Au revoir, my darling.”

“Au revoir — Be at ease, mamma will not forget, I will make her remember.”

When Hélène returned from the anteroom, whither she had accompanied Monsieur Rambaud, the hands marked a quarter of three. In a quarter of an hour, all would be over. Motionless in front of the fire-place, she had a sudden vision of the scene that was about to happen: Juliette was already there, Henri was entering and taking her by surprise. She knew the room, she perceived the slightest details with horrible clearness. Then, still moved by Monsieur Rambaud's lamentable story, she felt an overpowering shudder mount from her limbs to her face. A voice cried out within her. The course that she had taken was infamous,—that letter, that cowardly denunciation. Like a dazzling flash it suddenly occurred to her. In truth she had committed such a crime! And she recalled the impulse with which she had thrown the letter into the box, stupefied like a person who might see another commit a crime, without thinking of interfering. She was, as it were, awaking from a dream.

What, then, was happening? why was she there, ever following the hands of the dial? Two minutes more had passed.

"Mamma," said Jeanne, "if you wish, we will go and see the doctor together, this evening — That will give me a walk. I feel stifled to-day."

Hélène did not hear. There were still thirteen minutes. She could not, however, let such an abominable act be consummated. In the tumult of her reawakening, she felt only a furious impulse to stop it. It must be done or she could no longer live. In a fit of frenzy, she ran about the room.

"Ah! you are going to take me!" Jeanne exclaimed joyously. "We are going to see the doctor at once; are we not, little mother?"

"No, no," she replied, as in searching for her shoes, she stooped to look under the bed.

She did not find them; she assumed an air of supreme indifference, thinking that she could indeed go out in the low house shoes that she had on. She now turned everything upside down in the mirror-doored wardrobe to find her shawl. Jeanne had approached with a very wheedling way.

"Then, you are not going to the doctor's, little mother?"

"No."

"Tell me that you will take me all the same — Oh! take me, you will give me so much pleasure!"

But Hélène at last found her shawl, she threw it over her shoulders. *Mon Dieu!* only twelve minutes, just time enough to run there. She would go, she would do something, no matter what. On the way, she would determine.

"Little mother, do take me," Jeanne repeated in tones that grew fainter and more touching.

"I cannot take you," said Hélène. "I am going where children do not go — Give me my bonnet."

Jeanne's countenance had grown wan. Her eyes became dull, and she spoke in gasps.

She asked:

"Where are you going?"

The mother did not answer, she was busy tying the ribbons of her bonnet.

The child continued:

"You are always going out without me now —— Yesterday, you went out; to-day, you went out; and here you are going out again. As for me, I suffer too much, I am afraid here, all alone —— Oh! I shall die, if you leave me —— You hear, I shall die, little mother ——"

Then bursting forth into sobs and attacked by grief and anger, she clung to Hélène's skirt.

"Come, let me go, be good, I am coming back," repeated the latter.

"No, I do not want to ——, no, I do not want to ——" the child faltered. "Oh! you no longer love me, otherwise you would take me —— Oh! I feel, indeed, that you love others better —— Take me, take me, or I will stay here on the floor, you will find me here on the floor when you return ——"

And she twined her little arms around her mother's legs, she wept with her face buried in the folds of her dress, while clinging to her with her whole weight so as to prevent her from advancing. The hands of the clock were going onward, it was ten minutes of three. Then

Hélène thought that she would never arrive there soon enough; and scarcely knowing what she was doing, she threw off Jeanne violently, exclaiming:

“What an unbearable child! This is perfect tyranny! — If you cry, you will have to do with me!”

She went out, slamming the door behind her. Jeanne had gone back staggering to the window, her tears suddenly checked by this rough treatment, her body rigid and her face quite white. She stretched out her arms toward the door and twice cried out: “Mamma! mamma!”

And she remained on the chair into which she had fallen, her eyes staring, and her face distorted by the jealous thought that her mother was deceiving her.

Once in the street, Hélène hastened her step. The rain had ceased; but large drops fell from the spouts, and drenched her shoulders. She had decided to reflect outside and arrange a plan. But her only desire now was to reach her destination. When she entered the Passage des Eaux,

she hesitated for a second. The steps were changed into a torrent, the gutters of the Rue Raynouard were overflowing and forming pools. Along the steps, closely hemmed in by the walls, the stream at times broke into foam, while here and there, washed by the rain-storm, spots on the pavement shone like a mirror. A flash of dull light, falling from the gray sky, gave to the passage a whiter tone between the dark branches of the trees. Hélène went down, hardly lifting her skirts. The water mounted to her ankles, her little shoes almost stuck fast in the puddles; and she heard around her, along the descent, a swishing sound, like the murmur of brooks winding through grass, in woodland depths.

All of a sudden, she found herself on the stairway, in front of the door. She remained there, panting and tortured. Then remembering, she determined to knock at the kitchen.

“What, it is you!” said old dame Fétu.

She had lost her whining voice. Her little eyes shone, whilst the laugh of an old pimp played in the thousand wrinkles of her face. She was no

longer embarrassed, she patted her on the hands, while listening to her disconnected words.

Hélène gave her twenty francs.

"God will repay you!" stammered old mother Fétu from habit. "Anything you wish, my little lady."

IV

Leaning back in an arm-chair, stretching out his legs in front of the huge fire that blazed on the hearth, Malignon waited tranquilly. ' He had had sufficiently good taste to close the window-curtains and to light the candles. The first room, where he was, was brightly illuminated by a small lustre and two candelabra. In the bedroom, on the contrary, semi-darkness reigned; only the crystal pendant shed the glimmer of a faint twilight. Malignon pulled out his watch.

"The deuce!" he murmured, "would she make me wait again to-day?"

And he yawned languidly. He had been waiting for an hour, and did not find it very entertaining. He arose, however, and glanced at the arrangements prepared. The placing of the arm-chairs did not please him and he rolled a sofa

in front of the fire-place. The candles were burning and cast their red reflection on the cretonne hangings, the room was getting warm, silent, hushed; whilst without, the wind blew in sudden gusts. Then he visited the bedroom for the last time, and there he tasted the pleasure of satisfied vanity: it seemed to him to be very comfortable, quite "chic," wadded like an alcove, the bed lost in a voluptuous background. Just at the moment of giving a dainty turn to the lace on the pillows, he heard three hurried knocks. It was the signal.

"At last," he exclaimed aloud, with a triumphant air.

He ran to open the door. Juliette entered, veiled and huddled up in a fur cloak. Whilst Malignon was gently shutting the door, she stood for an instant motionless and without betraying the emotion that prevented her speaking. But before the young man had time to take hold of her hand, she raised her veil and showed a smiling countenance, a little pale, but quite calm.

"Why! you have lighted up," she exclaimed. "I thought that you detested candles in broad daylight."

Malignon, who hastened to clasp her in his arms, with a passionate movement that he had meditated, was discountenanced and explained that the day was too dismal, that his windows looked out on vacant lots. Moreover, he adored the night.

"One is never sure with you," she continued, joking with him. "Last spring, at my children's ball, you caused me a lot of trouble, according to you it was like being in a vault, entering into the presence of the dead — Let us sum it up by saying that your taste has changed."

She seemed to be on a visit, and affected an assurance that somewhat intensified her voice. This was the only evidence of her agitation. At moments, there was a slight twitching of the chin, as if she felt some trouble in the throat. But her eyes sparkled, she was tasting the keen pleasure of her imprudence. Her thoughts changed, she was thinking of Madame de Chermette, who had a lover. *Mon Dieu!* it was strange all the same.

"Let us see your establishment," she continued.

And she made the round of the room. He was following her, reflecting that he should have

embraced her at once; now, he could not, he would have to wait.

She was examining the furniture, and the walls; she raised her head, and stepped back, talking all the while.

"I hardly like your cretonne. It is so common! Where did you find that abominable red? — See, there is a chair that would be all right, if the wood were not overgilded — And not a picture, not a knickknack; nothing but your lustre and your candelabra that are not in good style — Ah, well! my dear, I advise you to make fun of my Japanese pavilion again!"

She laughed, and thus avenged herself for his former attacks, which she had always spitefully remembered against him.

"Your taste is good, let us confess it! — But you do not know that my figure is worth more than all your furniture! — A clerk at a novelty store would not have chosen that pink there. You have, then, been dreaming of captivating your washerwoman?"

Malignon was very much vexed and made no reply. He tried to lead her into the bedroom. She remained on the threshold, saying that she never entered places that were so dark. Moreover, she saw sufficiently, the bedroom was worthy of the salon. All that came from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. She was especially amused at the hanging lamp. She was pitiless, she was incessantly returning to that pinchbeck night-lamp, the dream of the young workwoman who has no furniture of her own. One would find similar lamps in every bazaar for seven francs and a half.

"I paid ninety francs for it! ——" Malignon at last exclaimed impatiently.

Then she seemed delighted at having made him angry. Having regained his composure, he asked her insinuatingly :

"Won't you take off your cloak?"

"Yes," she replied, "it is very warm in your establishment!"

She even took off her bonnet, which with the furs, he went to place on the bed. When he

returned, he found her seated in front of the fire, still looking around her. She had become serious again; she was disposed to show a conciliatory manner.

"It is very ugly, but you are not badly off, however. The two rooms might have been made very attractive."

"Oh! for the use I intend to make of them!" he let slip, heedlessly, with an indifferent gesture.

He immediately regretted these stupid words. He could not have been coarser or more awkward in his expression. She had bent her head, again seized with a painful trouble in her throat. For an instant, she had forgotten why she was there. He desired at any rate to take advantage of the embarrassed situation in which he had placed her.

"Juliette," he murmured as he leaned toward her.

With a gesture, she caused him to sit down. It was at the sea-baths, at Trouville, that Malignon, wearied by the monotonous view of the ocean, had conceived the splendid idea of falling in love.

For three years, they had been living on terms of quarrelsome familiarity. One evening, he took hold of her hand. She did not get angry, but joked at first. Then, empty-headed and heart free, she imagined that she loved him. Until then, she had done almost all that her friends were doing around her; but she lacked a passion, and curiosity and the desire to be like others impelled her forward. At first, if the young man had shown himself determined, she would most certainly have succumbed. He was so vain as to wish to conquer by his wit, and he allowed her to become accustomed to the part of coquette that she was playing. And so, on his first outbreak, one night as they were watching the sea together like the lovers in a comic opera, she had dismissed him, astonished and irritated at his destroying the romance from which she derived her amusement. At Paris, Malignon had vowed to act more shrewdly. He had just surprised her in a state of ennui, at the close of a fatiguing winter, when the ordinary pleasures, dinners, balls, first nights, began to tire her by their monotony. The

idea of expressly furnished apartments in an obscure quarter, the mystery of such a meeting-place, the tinge of suspicious odor that she scented, had snared her. It seemed to her to be original and one ought to see everything. She possessed within her a calm so perfect that she felt about as little uneasiness in visiting Malignon as when she called at the artists' studios to beg canvases for her charity fairs.

"Juliette, Juliette," the young man repeated, seeking to infuse caressing tones into his words.

"Come, be sensible," she merely said.

She took a Chinese screen from the mantel-piece, and continued, thoroughly at ease and as if she were in her own salon:

"You know that we rehearsed this morning — I am very much afraid that I did not make a good stroke in choosing Madame Berthier. She makes a pitiful Mathilde, unbearable — That charming soliloquy, when she addresses her purse: 'Poor little one, I kissed you a moment ago —' Well, she recites it like a boarding-school girl who has prepared a complimentary piece — I am very much put out."

"And Madame de Guiraud?" he asked, bringing his chair closer and taking hold of her hand.

"Oh! she is perfect —— I have unearthed in her an excellent Madame de Léry, who will be sarcastic and forceful ——"

She abandoned her hand to him and he kissed it between her phrases, without her appearing to notice it.

"But the worst, you see," she said, "is that you are not there. In the first place, you could talk to Madame Berthier; then, it is impossible for us to get a good *ensemble*, if you never come."

He had succeeded in passing one arm about her waist.

"Since I know my part ——," he murmured.

"Yes, that's all very well; but there is the stage-setting to regulate —— It is hardly considerate of you not to devote three or four mornings to us."

She could not continue, he showered a torrent of kisses on her neck. Then she could not fail to notice that he was holding her in his arms and she pushed him away, lightly fanning him with

the Chinese fan, which she had retained. She had doubtless vowed not to let him go any farther. Her white face flushed under the heat reflected from the fire, and she pursed her lips with the pouting expression of a woman who is astonished at her sensations. Certainly, it could be only that! One should have foreseen it; she was seized with fear.

"Let me go," she stammered, with a forced smile, "you will make me angry again ——"

But he thought that he had moved her. He was calculating coldly: "If I allow her to leave here as she entered, she is lost to me." Words were useless, he seized her hands again, and tried to reach her shoulders. For an instant she seemed to abandon herself to him. She had only to shut her eyes, she would know all. She felt a desire to do so, and debated the matter with her inner self, calmly and clearly. It seemed to her, however, that a voice was crying: "No." It was she who had cried out, even before she had herself answered.

"No, no," she repeated, "let me go, you are hurting me —— I will not, I will not."

As he was still silent and forcing her towards the bedroom, she broke away violently. She was yielding to singular impulses, apart from her desires; she was vexed with herself and with him. In her trouble some disconnected words escaped her. Ah! certainly, he was requiting her very badly for her confidence. What, then, did he expect in showing that violence? She considered him a coward. Never in her life would she see him again. But he let her talk until she became confused, following her with a wicked and stupid laugh. At last, stammering confusedly, she took refuge behind an arm-chair, suddenly vanquished, realizing that she was his, without his having yet reached out his hands to possess her. It was one of the most disagreeable moments of her life.

And there they were, face to face, their countenances transformed, ashamed but passionate, when a noise was heard. At first, they did not realize what it was. Some one had opened a door, and footsteps were crossing the room, whilst a voice called out to them:

“Escape! escape! — You will be caught.”

It was H  l  ne. Dazed, they both looked at her. Their astonishment was so great that they forgot the embarrassment of the situation. Juliette did not show the least perplexity.

“Escape!” H  l  ne repeated. “Your husband will be here in two minutes.”

“My husband!” the young woman stammered, “my husband — Why? for what reason?”

She became foolish. Her brain was confused. It seemed to her most marvellous that H  l  ne should be there and speaking to her of her husband. But the latter made an angry movement.

“Ah! if you think that I have time to explain to you — He is coming. You are warned. Leave quickly; leave, both of you.”

Then Juliette became unwontedly agitated. She ran about the rooms, distracted and uttering disjointed phrases:

“Oh! my God! Oh! my God — I thank you. Where is my cloak? How stupid it is, this room is all dark! Give me my cloak, bring a candle that I may find my cloak — My dear, pay no attention, if I do not thank you — I

cannot find the sleeves; no, I can't find them, I can do no more ——”

Fear was paralyzing her, it was necessary for Hélène to help her to put on her cloak. She put her bonnet on awry, and did not even tie the strings. But the worst was that they lost a whole minute in looking for her veil, which had fallen under the bed —— She sobbed and her hands moved at random, nervously fumbling over herself to see if she were forgetting anything that might compromise her.

“What a lesson! what a lesson! —— Ah! it is well over, thanks be!”

Malignon, who was very pale, cut a sorry figure. He was tramping about, feeling both detested and ridiculous. The only clear reflection that he was in a condition to make was that he had certainly no chance. His lips could only frame this poor question:

“Then, you think that I ought to leave also?”

And as no one answered him, he took up his cane, continuing to talk the while as though affecting perfect composure. There was ample time.

Why, of course, there was another stairway, a small, disused servants' stairway, but which one could still use. Madame Deberle's hack had remained in front of the door; it would take them both along the quays.

And he repeated:

"Be calm, then. All goes well — See, it is this way."

He opened a door, exposing to view the suite of three little rooms, dark and dilapidated and in a filthy condition. A puff of damp air was wafted in. Juliette, before stepping into that wretched place, felt a final shudder of revulsion, and asked in a loud tone:

"How could I have come? What an abomination! — I shall never forgive myself."

"Hurry!" said Hélène, who was as anxious as herself.

She pushed her forward. Then the young woman threw herself on her neck, weeping. She was experiencing a nervous reaction. Shame was possessing her and she would have liked to defend herself, to explain why she had been found in that man's

house. Then, as if moved by instinct, she raised her petticoats, as if about to cross a stream. Malignon, who led the way, kicked aside with the toe of his boot the pieces of plaster that littered the servants' stairway. The doors were shut again.

Hélène, however, had remained standing in the middle of the small salon. She was listening. Silence had settled on all around her, a deep silence, pent up and warm, disturbed only by the crackling of the embers of the logs. Her ears were ringing, but she heard nothing. But after a time that appeared to her interminable, she heard the hurried rumbling of a carriage. It was Juliette's hack that was leaving. Then she sighed, she mutely expressed her gratitude by a gesture. The thought that she would not suffer unending remorse for having acted basely, overran her heart with a vague sense of sweetness and gratitude. She felt comforted and very much chastened, but so suddenly weak, after the terrible crisis from which she had emerged, that, in her turn, she no longer felt herself strong enough to leave the place. In

her heart, she thought that Henri would come and that he ought to find some one there. Some one knocked and she opened the door at once.

They were at first greatly surprised. Henri entered, full of anxiety about the unsigned letter that he had received, and betraying in his pale countenance the uneasiness he felt. But, when he saw her, a cry broke from his lips.

“You! —— My God! it was you!”

In that cry, there was more of astonishment than satisfaction. He hardly counted on that meeting, brought about so boldly. All his desires as a man were then awakened by so unforeseen an offer, especially amid the voluptuous mystery of that retreat.

“You love me, you love me,” he stammered. “After all, here you are, and I did not understand you!”

He opened his arms, he wanted to embrace her. Hélène had smiled on him as he entered. Now, she was very pale and drew back. She had certainly waited for him, she had said to herself that they would chat together for an instant, and that

she would invent some story. Suddenly, the situation now dawned on her. Henri believed it to be an appointment. Never had she thought of that. She revolted at the idea.

“Henri, I entreat you —— Leave me ——”

But he had seized her wrists, and was drawing her slowly to him, as if to win her immediately with a kiss. The love that had been developing in him for months, although it had slumbered recently through the interruption of their intimacy, broke out with the greater intensity as he was beginning to forget Hélène. All the blood of his heart mounted to his cheeks; she struggled with herself on recognizing the passion depicted in his face, and became alarmed. Twice before he had looked at her thus wildly.

“Leave me, you make me afraid —— I swear to you that you are mistaken.”

Once more he seemed surprised.

“Surely it was you who wrote to me?” he asked.

She hesitated for a second, what could she say, what answer?

"Yes," she at last murmured.

She could not, however, betray Juliette after having saved her. It was as if she felt herself gliding into an abyss. Henri was now examining the two rooms, astonished at their illumination and decoration. He made bold to question her.

"Are these your apartments?"

Then as she remained silent:

"Your letter greatly disturbed me — Hélène, you are concealing something from me. I implore you, reassure me."

She was not listening, she was thinking that he was justified in believing the meeting to be sought. What could she have been doing there, why had she waited? She found no explanatory cause. She was not even certain that she had not given him that appointment. She felt herself becoming entangled and her will was slowly vanishing.

He was urging her still more. He questioned her in close contact, lip to lip, to wring the truth from her.

"You were waiting for me, you were waiting for me?" he asked.

Then yielding, without strength, and again overcome by lassitude and tenderness, she consented to say what he wished, to desire what he desired.

"I was waiting for you, Henri ——"

Their lips again met.

"But why this letter? —— And I find you here! —— Where are we, then?"

"Don't ask me, never seek to know —— You must swear to me that you never will —— I am beside you, that is clear to you. What more do you ask?"

"You love me?"

"Yes, I love you."

"You are mine, Hélène, wholly mine?"

"Yes, wholly."

Lip seeking lip, they had kissed each other. She had become oblivious to everything, and was submitting to a superior force. It now seemed to her natural, even necessary. She was filled with an inward calm, only the sensations and recollections of youth recurred to her. She recalled how on such a winter's day, when she was a young

girl, in the Rue des Petites-Maries, she had been nearly suffocated in an unventilated room, by the fumes of a huge charcoal fire used for ironing. That on another day, in summer, a greenfinch in wandering flight through the gloomy street had entered by the open window and made the tour of her room. Why, then, was she musing over her death, why did she recall the flight of that bird? Delightfully oblivious to her present existence, she felt herself, however, steeped in melancholy and childish thoughts:

“But you are wet,” Henri murmured. “You came on foot, then?”

He lowered his voice, adopting the phrases of intimate friends, he whispered in her ear as if he feared they might be heard. Now that she was yielding to him, in her presence his passionate desires vacillated, he enfolded her in an ardent but timid embrace, his daring subdued and delaying the hour of accomplishment. He felt a paternal anxiety about her health, and needed to distract his thoughts by some tender and minute attentions to her.

"Your feet are wet, you will get sick," he repeated. "*Mon Dieu!* is there any sense in running the streets with such shoes?"

He had made her sit in front of the fire. She smiled and made no resistance, allowing him to take hold of her feet in order to remove her shoes. Her low house-shoes, which had burst open while wading through the puddles in the Passage des Eaux, were as heavy as sponges. He took them off, and put one on each side of the fire-place. Her stockings were also damp and marked with a muddy stain as far as the ankle. Without a thought of blushing on her part, he took them off with a sudden movement expressive of mingled vexation and tenderness, saying:

"This is the way that one catches cold. Warm yourself."

And he had pushed forward a stool. Hélène's feet were as cold as ice, and as they rested in front of the fire, they were lit up with its rosy reflection. They were somewhat inconvenienced by the stifling heat. At the lower end, the bedroom with its large bed was wrapped in the stillness of

slumber; the night-lamp had gone out, one of the portières, unhooked from its fastening, half shrouded the door. In the little salon, the candles, which were burning very high, had permeated the atmosphere with the odorous warmth that fills a room at the close of a soirée. At times the dripping of a shower could be heard from without, its dull rumbling interrupting the deep silence.

"Yes, it is true, I am cold," she murmured, shivering in spite of the intense warmth.

Her icy feet were frozen. He wanted to take them in his hands altogether. His hands were burning and would warm them very soon.

"Do you feel how warm they are?" he asked. "Your feet are so small that I can cover them entirely."

He clasped them in his feverish fingers. Only their rosy extremities were visible. She lifted her heels, making a slight cracking sound with the ankles. Then he opened her fine and delicate hands, with their thumbs slightly parted and looked at them for a few seconds. The temptation was too strong, he kissed them. As she trembled, he said:

"No, no, warm yourself —— When you are warm."

Both had lost consciousness of time and place. They had a vague impression that it was an advanced hour of a winter night. Those candles that were burning low in the drowsy moisture of the room, made them think that they had been watching for hours. But they had lost all idea of their whereabouts. Around them, a desert seemed stretched out; not a sound, not a human voice, the impression of a black sea over which a tempest was raging. They were away from the world, a thousand leagues from land. And that forgetfulness of the bonds that attached them to beings and things was so absolute that it seemed to have sprung into existence there at that very moment, and that it must die there soon, when they should take each other in their arms.

Speech even failed them. Words had no meaning for them. Perhaps they had known each other elsewhere, but that former meeting had no interest. For them, the present minute only existed, and they prolonged its enjoyment, without speaking of

their love, and already accustomed to each other as after ten years of marriage.

"Are you warm?"

"Oh! yes, thank you."

A feeling of anxiety made her stoop. She murmured :

"My shoes will never be dry."

He reassured her, took the little shoes, leaned them against the andirons, saying in a very low voice:

"They will get dry in that way, I assure you."

He turned around, again kissed her feet, and clasped her waist. The coal that filled the hearth was scorching both. She did not resist those groping hands that strayed under the impulse of desire. In the extinction of all her surroundings and of her own individuality, only the memory of her youth asserted itself, the recollection of that room with its almost overpowering heat, the large stove with its irons, over which she leaned; and she recalled that she had then felt a similar obliviousness, that this was not more sweet, that the kisses with which Henri was covering her were not slowly

killing her with more delightful sensations. When he suddenly took her in his arms, to bear her into the bedroom, she experienced a final moment of anxiety. She thought that some one had called out, it seemed to her that she was forgetting some one who was sobbing in the dark. But it was only a shiver, she looked around the room and saw no one. That room was strange to her, no object appealed to her. A heavier downpour was falling and its continuous rattle sounded in her ears. Then, as if seized with a desire to sleep, she drooped on Henri's shoulder, and submitted to be carried. As they passed through the doorway the other portière slipped from its hooks, and closed behind them.

When Hélène returned, barefooted, to look for her shoes in front of the dying fire, she thought that they had never loved each other less than on that day.

V

Jeanne, looking fixedly at the door, remained plunged in the deep grief caused by her mother's sudden departure. She looked around, the room was empty and silent; but she still heard the echoes of the hurried steps as they moved away, the rustling of a skirt, the door on the landing noisily shut. Then, all was quiet. And she was alone.

All alone, all alone. On the bed hung her mother's dressing-gown, thrown down at random, the skirt spread out, one sleeve resting on the bolster, and in its crushed state looking like a person who might have fallen there overcome by poignant grief, and giving away to sobs. Linen garments were lying around. A black neckerchief on the floor suggested a spot of mourning. Amid the disordered room, with its scattered chairs and

the table pushed in front of the glass-door wardrobe, she was alone, she felt that her tears were choking her, as she looked at the dressing-gown which no longer clothed her mother lying there, stretched out with all the harshness of a shroud. She clasped her hands, and called a last time: "Mamma! mamma!" But with the blue velvet hangings the room was deaf to her cry. It was all over, she was alone.

Then the hours slipped away. Three o'clock struck. A dim and hazy light entered through the windows. The soot-colored clouds darkened the sky still more. Through the window-panes, which were covered with a slight mist, one saw Paris, as a blurred mass, undistinguishable through a misty vapor, and its suburbs lost in dense fumes. The city itself was not there to keep company with the child, as on those clear afternoons, when it seemed to her that on leaning out a little she could touch its quarters with her hand.

What could she do? In despair, her little arms were clasped on her breast. Her forsaking seemed to her to be unbounded, impenetrable, and so unjust

and wicked that it maddened her. She had never seen anything so vile, she thought that everything was about to disappear, that nothing would ever be restored to her. Then, in an arm-chair near her, she noticed her doll, seated with its back against a cushion, its legs stretched out, and staring at her, for all the world like a human being. It was not her mechanical doll, but a large one with a pasteboard head, curly hair, enamel eyes, whose fixed look occasionally disturbed her; she had undressed and dressed it for two years, and the chin and cheeks had lost their color, the pink-colored, bran-stuffed limbs had become as limp and soft and shapeless as old linen. The doll was at this moment in night toilet, only a night-gown on, its arms twisted, one in the air, the other hanging down. Seeing that some one was with her, Jeanne felt for an instant less miserable. She took the doll in her arms, hugged it so violently that its head fell backwards, its neck broken. She chatted to it, saying it was the best, that it was kind-hearted, for it never went out and left her all alone. It was

her treasure, her little pet, her little sweetheart. Trembling, and endeavoring to prevent a further fit of weeping, she covered it with kisses.

This storm of kisses avenged her somewhat, the doll fell back on her arm like a rag. She had arisen, she was looking out, resting her forehead against a window-pane. The rain had ceased, the clouds of the last shower, borne along by a gust of wind, were rolling along the horizon towards the heights of Père-Lachaise which were shrouded in misty, gray light; and Paris, with that stormy background, lighted with a uniform light, stood out in solitary, gloomy grandeur. It seemed depopulated, like the visionary cities of a nightmare, the reflex of some dead world. Certainly, it was not pretty. She was dreamily thinking of the people whom she had loved since she had been in the world. Her first friend was at Marseilles, a big reddish cat, which was very heavy; she used to clasp her little hands under its belly, carrying it in that way from one chair to another, without its becoming angry; then it had disappeared; that was the first grief she remembered.

Then she had had a sparrow; it had died, she had picked it up one morning from the bottom of the cage; that made two. She did not count her playthings that were broken in order to grieve her, nor all kinds of wrong which had pained her so much, because she was so silly. A doll no higher than her hand, had especially afflicted her because it allowed its head to be crushed; she loved it so dearly that she had even buried it secretly in a corner of the courtyard; and later, seized with a desire to see it again, she had disinterred it and had made herself sick with fright, on finding it so black and so ugly. It was always the others who first lost their love for her. They were spoiled, they went away; in fact, it was their fault. Why, then? She never changed, not she. When she loved any one, her love would last for life. She could not comprehend desertion. That was an atrocious, a monstrous thing, and could not enter her little heart without shattering it. She shivered at the confused thoughts that were slowly awakened in her. Then people part some day, each going in his own direction,

never to see or love each other again. And gazing on Paris, immense and sad looking, she remained there, this girl of twelve years, chilled by the thought of life's cruelties, which her passion enabled her to comprehend.

Meantime, the window-pane had become still more clouded by her breathing. With her hand, she wiped away the moisture that blotted out the view. Monuments, in the distance, washed by the shower, glittered like polished glass. Lines of houses, neat and clear, seen with their pale fronts, in the midst of the roofs, looked like linen stretched out, some giant washing drying on meadows of ruddy grass. The light was becoming brighter, through the tail end of the cloud that still covered the city with mist, the milky rays of the sun filtered; and a hesitating brightness seemed to hover over some sections, corners of the sky that were about to break forth in smiles. Jeanne was looking down on the quay and on the slopes of the Trocadéro, at the life of the streets, reawakening after that heavy rain, which fell in rapid showers. The hacks were resuming their

slow, jolting course, whilst the omnibuses rumbled on with a noise that seemed doubled amid the silence of the still deserted highways. Umbrellas were being shut, passers-by who had taken shelter under the trees braved the passage from one sidewalk to the other, crossing through the streams that were flowing to the gutters. She was especially interested in a lady and a little girl who were very well dressed, whom she saw standing under the awning of a toy-store, near the bridge. They had taken refuge there, no doubt overtaken by the rain. The little one would have stripped the store for her varied wants, she was tormenting the lady to get her a hoop; now, they were going away; the child, who was running, merry and free, was driving the hoop along the sidewalk. Then, Jeanne once more grew very sad, her doll seemed frightful to her. She wanted a hoop, to be down there running about, while her mother would walk slowly along behind her, calling to her not to go so far ahead. Everything was getting blurred again. At every moment she wiped the pane. She had been forbidden to

open the window; but she felt herself full of rebellious thoughts, she could at least look out, since no one took her out.

She opened the window, and leaned on her elbows like a grown person, just like her mother did when she took her station there in silence.

The air was mild, of a humid mildness, that to her seemed very pleasant. A shadow, gradually extending along the horizon, made her look up. The impression made on her was that of a giant bird, hovering over her with outspread wings. At first she saw nothing, the sky remained clear; but a dark spot showed itself at the corner of the roof, spread out and covered the sky. Driven onward by a terrific west wind, a squall approached. The daylight had vanished rapidly, the city was dark, and its house-fronts shone with a livid glimmer of the tinge of old rust. Almost immediately the rain fell. The streets were swept by it. Umbrellas were turned inside out, pedestrians, flying in all directions, disappeared like straws. An old lady was holding up her skirts with both hands, whilst the rain was beating on her bonnet with

the force of a spout. And the rain traveled onward, one could follow the flight of the cloud by the furious rushing of the water toward Paris; the heavy drops looked like a solid bar as they filed along the avenues of the quays as rapidly as the gallop of a runaway horse, raising a fine white dust whose smoke rolled along the ground at a prodigious pace; they passed down the Champs-Élysées, became engulfed in the long, straight streets of the Saint-Germain quarter, and filled at a bound the broad spaces, the empty places, the deserted squares. In a few seconds, behind that mesh that grew thicker each moment, the city grew dim and seemed to fade away. It seemed as if a curtain had been drawn obliquely from the vast heavens to the earth. Masses of vapor rolled upward, the continuous pattering of the huge raindrops made a deafening noise like old iron being moved.

Jeanne, stunned by the din, drew back. It seemed to her that a gray wall had been built in front of her. But she adored the rain and returned once more, leaned on her elbows and

stretched out her arms, to feel the cold, heavy drops strike and splash over her hands. That amused her and she got wet up to the sleeves. Her doll, like herself, must be getting a headache. And so she had just laid it down astride on the window-guard, with its back against the wall. And, on seeing the drops spatter it, she thought that it was doing it good. The doll, quite rigid, with its little teeth exposed by its perpetual smile, was soaked at one shoulder from which drops trickled, while gusts of wind raised up its night-gown. Its poor body, from which the bran had escaped, was shivering.

Why, then, did her mother not take her? The rain beating on her hands, was a new temptation to Jeanne to be outside. One must be very jolly in the street. And she saw again, through the veil of the shower, the little girl pushing a hoop on the sidewalk. It could not be said that she had not gone out with her mother. Even they appeared quite satisfied. That proved that people took out little girls when it rained. But it was necessary to be determined to go. Why had she

not been determined? Then, she again thought of her reddish cat that had disappeared, with its tail in the air, over the houses opposite, then on that little sparrow, which she had tried to induce to eat when it was dead, and which had seemed not to understand. Those events were constantly recurring to her, and she felt that she was not loved dearly enough. Oh! she would have been ready in two minutes; the days when it pleased her, she dressed quickly; as for her boots, why Rosalie buttoned them, then the winter coat, the hat, and it was done. Her mother could easily have waited for her a couple of minutes. When she went down to her friends' house, she did not turn everything topsy-turvy as she had done; when she went to the Bois de Boulogne, she led her gently by the hand, and stopped with her in front of each shop in the Rue de Passy. Jeanne did not fathom the mystery, her dark eyebrows were knit, her fine features assumed an expression of jealous severity which gave her the wan appearance of some wicked old maid. She had a vague conviction that her mother had

gone to some place where children do not go. She had not been taken because there was something to conceal from her. These thoughts oppressed her heart with an unspeakable sadness, she was ill.

The rain was becoming finer, and there were places in the curtain that veiled Paris through which the city could be seen. The dome of the Invalides reappeared first, bright and quivering, in the dancing light of the shower. Then, whole quarters emerged from the retreating wave, the city seemed to emerge from a deluge, with its trickling roofs, and streets still washed by rivers from which clouds of vapor ascended. But, all of a sudden, a blaze burst out, a ray of light pierced the shower. For an instant, it was like a smile breaking out amid tears. The rain had ceased to fall on the Champs-Élysées quarter, but it was slashing the left bank, the Cité, the distant Faubourgs; and one saw its drops in files, flashing in the sun like darts of steel, slender and serried. Toward the right, a rainbow appeared. In proportion as the ray spread across the sky, red and blue patches daubed the

horizon with a medley of colors such as a child might lay on. There was a sudden blaze, as it were, a fall of golden snow upon a crystal city. Then the ray died out, a cloud rolled over it and the smile was drowned in tears under the lead-colored sky, and Paris dripped with a sound as of prolonged sobbing.

Jeanne, whose sleeves were soaked, had a fit of coughing. But she did not feel the cold that was penetrating her, being now occupied only with the thought that her mother had gone down into Paris. She had come to know three monuments, the Invalides, the Panthéon, and the Saint-Jacques tower; she repeated their names, and pointed them out with the finger, without imagining what they would be like when looked at at close range. Doubtless her mother was down there, and she decided that she was at the Panthéon, because it astonished her the most, vast and towering in the air as if it were the proud crest of the city. Then she questioned herself. Paris to her was still that place where children do not go. She was never taken there. She would have liked to know it, to be able to

say to herself quietly: "Mamma is there, she is doing such a thing now." But it seemed to her too vast to ever meet any one there. Then her glance was directed to the other end of the plain. Was it not more probable that her mother was in that group of houses, to the left, on a hill? or quite near, under the large trees whose bare branches resembled fagots of dead wood? If she could have raised the roofs! What was that very black monument? and that street, through which some huge thing was speeding? and all that quarter that she dreaded, because she felt sure that people beat one another there. She did not distinguish clearly; but, without lying, it stirred one, it was very ugly, and little girls must not look at it. All sorts of vague suppositions, which made her long to cry, troubled her childish ignorance. Unknown Paris, with its fumes, its continual rumbling, its mighty life, wafted to her in that sloppy thaw, an odor of poverty, of filth and crime, which made her young head swim, as if she had been leaning over one of those pestiferous wells, that exhale the suffocating fumes of their

invisible slime. The Invalides, the Panthéon, the Saint-Jacques tower, she named, she counted them; then, she knew no more, but remained frightened and ashamed, possessed by the one thought that her mother was among those mean things, somewhere that she did not know, but down there in the lowest depths.

Suddenly, Jeanne turned around. She would have sworn that some one had walked into the room; that a light hand had even brushed her shoulder. But the room was empty, in the torpid disorder in which Hélène had left it; the dressing-gown was still in its weeping attitude, stretched out, crumpled on the bolster. Jeanne was very pale, and looking around the room, felt that her heart was broken. She was alone, she was alone. *Mon Dieu!* and her mother on leaving, had pushed her so violently, enough to throw her on the floor. That recollection filled her with anguish, she again felt the pain of that brutality in her hands and in her shoulders. Why had she been beaten? She was good, she had nothing with which to reproach herself. Ordinarily, they spoke to her so gently,

that that punishment made her rebellious. She felt a return of her childish fears, when they threatened her with the wolf and when having looked for it, she could not see it; in the shadow it seemed to her that there were things about to crush her. However, she doubted, and her face became pale and gradually swelled with a jealous rage. Then suddenly she thought that her mother must love the people to whom she had hurried, more than her, for she had jostled her so rudely, and she pressed both her hands upon her breast. She knew now. Her mother was betraying her.

Paris was plunged in great anxiety, expecting a fresh squall. A rumbling sound filled the darkened atmosphere, and thick clouds were floating overhead. Jeanne, still at the window, coughed violently; but she felt herself avenged by taking cold, she would have liked to get sick. With her hands pressed against her breast, she felt that it was there her suffering was growing. In her anguish, her body was neglected. She trembled from fear, and no longer dared to turn around, shivering at the idea of again looking about the

room. When one is little, one has no strength. What then was that new illness, whose attack was filling her with shame and bitter sweetness? When they teased her, when they tickled her in spite of her laughter, she had sometimes felt that exasperated shiver. All rigid, she waited, her innocent and pure limbs in revolt. From her innermost being, from her awakened woman's nature, a keen pang started, as if she had received a blow from afar. Then, fainting, she uttered a smothered cry: "Mamma! mamma!" without it being apparent whether she was calling her mother to her aid, or whether she was accusing her of bringing on her that illness of which she was dying.

At that moment the tempest broke out. The dull silence of anxiety was broken by the howling of the storm over the now dark city, Paris creaked continuously, blinds beating, slates flying, chimney-stacks and gutter-pipes rebounding on the street pavements. There was a momentary calm; then a fresh gust passed, and swept the horizon with its colossal breath so that the ocean of roofs, tempest shaken, seemed to lift up its waves

and disappear in a whirlwind. For an instant, there was chaos. Enormous clouds, as black as outspread ink-spots, coursed wildly about among the smaller ones, scattered and floating, like rags torn to pieces by the wind and carried away thread by thread. In an instant, two clouds rushed together, shattering each other with such force, that the copper-colored space was strewn with their *débris*; and each time that the hurricane thus broke loose, blowing from all the points of the heavens, the air was filled with the noise of contending armies, of a mighty ruin that hung over Paris and threatened to crush it. It was not yet raining. But suddenly a cloud burst over the centre of the city, a waterspout sprung up and followed the course of the Seine. The green ribbon of the river, riddled and soiled by the splashing of the drops, was changed into a stream of mud; and, one by one, through the shower, the bridges came in view again, looking more slender and airy in the vapor; whilst, to right and to left, along the gray line of the sidewalks of the deserted quays, the trees shook furiously. Below, over Notre-Dame, the cloud

divided and poured down such a torrent that the city was submerged; over the flooded quarter, only the towers appeared to float in a rift of the sky like wreckage. But the sky opened in all directions, three times the right bank appeared to be swallowed up. The first downpour ravaged the distant faubourgs, and extending beat down on the pinnacles of Saint-Vincent de Paul and the tower of Saint-Jacques which shone white under the flood. Two other downpours following in close succession, streamed over Montmartre and the Champs-Élysées. At moments, one caught a fleeting glimpse of the glass roof of the Palais de l'Industrie that seemed to smoke as the drops rebounded from its surface; of Saint-Augustin, whose cupola floated at the bottom of a fog like a burnt-out moon; of the Madeleine that stretched out its flat roof, like the flood-washed flags of some deserted courtyard; whilst, behind, the enormous and seemingly tottering mass of the Opéra House made one think of a dismasted vessel, her hull hemmed between two rocks and resisting the assaults of the tempest. On the left bank of the river, veiled by a watery mist, one perceived the

Invalides dome, the spires of Sainte-Clotilde, and the towers of Saint-Sulpice, hazy and melting in the heavy, humid air. Another cloud spread out, and the colonnade of the Panthéon poured sheets of water that threatened to inundate the quarters below. And, from that moment, the floods of rain fell on the city at all points; one would have said that the heavens were tumbling upon the earth; streets were swallowed up, sinking to the bottom, then floating on the surface, amid shocks that seemed to pronounce the destruction of the city. A continuous rumbling mounted, the voice of the swollen gutters, the thunder of the waters flowing into the sewers. And now, above mud-stained Paris, which the showers had soiled with its own yellow tint, the pale, livid clouds broke and spread out evenly, without cleft or spot. The rain became finer, falling straight and sharp; and when a squall again blew, the gray hatching was marked with great waves, and the oblique rain could be heard driving almost horizontally against the walls with a hissing sound, until, the wind having fallen again, they once more fell perpendicularly, piercing

the ground with a quiet persistency, from the Passy heights to the flat country of Charenton.

Then the immense city, as if destroyed and lifeless as the result of a supreme convulsion, spread out its field of overthrown stones under the blotted-out heavens.

Jeanne, who had sunk down at the window, had again stammered out: "Mamma! mamma!" and an intense fatigue left her thoroughly exhausted, in view of the engulfed Paris. In her oblivious state, with her hair floating about her, and her countenance wet with the drops of rain, she still tasted the bitter pleasure that had just made her shiver, whilst her heart was mourning over some incurable grief.

Everything seemed to her to have reached its end, she realized that she was becoming very old.

The hours might pass, but she no longer even looked about the bedroom.

It was all the same to her, she was forgotten and alone. Such despair filled her childish heart that all was black around her.

If any one scolded her as formerly, when she was ill, it would be very unjust.

All this burned her, and affected her like a headache. Certainly, but a moment ago, something had been shattered within her. She could not help it. She must, perforce, yield to the wishes of others. Finally, she was too weary.

On the window-guard she had clasped her little arms, and resting her head, although she opened her eyes wide from time to time to watch the shower, she felt that drowsiness was overcoming her.

Still the rain fell, ever fell, the pale sky dissolved in water. A final gust had passed, and a monotonous rumble was heard. The rain monarch beat endlessly, in the midst of a solemn stillness, on the silent, deserted city that it had conquered. Behind the crystal streaked with that deluge was a phantom Paris, whose trembling outlines appeared to be dissolving. The scene no longer brought aught to Jeanne but a desire for sleep, and horrid dreams, as if her whole unknown nature, all the evil that she was ignorant of, had

exhaled itself in mist to penetrate her and make her cough. Each time that she opened her eyes, she was seized with a fit of coughing that shook her violently, and she remained there for some seconds looking out; then, letting her head drop again, she retained its image, which seemed to her to be spreading over her and crushing her.

The rain was still falling. What hour could it be, now? Jeanne could not have told. Perhaps the clock was no longer going. It seemed too fatiguing to turn round.

It must have been at least a week since her mother went out. She had ceased to expect her, and resigned herself to the idea of never seeing her again.

Then she forgot everything, the miseries that had been imposed upon her, the strange pain that she had just suffered, even her abandonment by every one. A weight settled on her, a weight with a stonelike coldness.

She was only very unhappy, oh! unhappy as the poor little lost ones sheltering under porches, to whom she gave sous.

Never would it end, she would be thus for years, it was too great and too heavy a trial for a little girl. *Mon Dieu!* how one coughed and how cold one was, when one was no longer loved!

She shut her heavy eyelids, her head swimming from a feverish drowsiness, and her last thought was a vague memory of childhood, a visit to a mill, with its yellow wheat, tiny grains that flowed under millstones as big as houses.

Hour after hour passed, each minute embodying a century.

The rain fell incessantly, in the same still way, as if all time and eternity were its, in which to drown the plain.

Jeanne was asleep. Near her, her doll, resting on the window-guard, its legs in the room and its head outside, with its night-gown clinging to its pink skin, its eyes fixed and water trickling from its hair, looked like a drowned creature; and it looked so lean in its comic yet heart-rending posture of a little corpse, that it might well make one weep.

Jeanne was coughing in her sleep; she no longer opened her eyes, but rolled her head from side to side on her crossed arms, and the cough ended in a wheeze, without her waking.

There was nothing more, she slept on in the dark, she did not even withdraw her hand, from whose reddened fingers clear raindrops fell one by one to the bottom of the vast space that opened out beneath the window.

This condition lasted hour after hour.

On the horizon, Paris had vanished like the shadow of a city, sky and earth were blended in a confused chaotic expanse, and withal the gray rain still fell with dogged persistency.

PART FIFTH

I

Nightfall had long since arrived when H  l  ne returned.

Whilst with difficulty she slowly ascended the stairs aided by the hand-rail, her umbrella left a train of drops on the steps. She paused before her door a few seconds to regain her breath, still stunned as she was by the roar of the rain around her, by the jostling of people who hurried past her and by the glare of the dancing lamplight reflected in the puddles. She was walking in a dream, under the spell of the surprise of the kisses just received and given; and, whilst she was looking for her key, she believed that she felt neither remorse nor joy. It was done, she could not have acted otherwise. But she did not find her key; no doubt she had inadvertently left it in the pocket of her other dress. She was very

much annoyed, as it seemed to her that she was excluded from her own house. She had to ring.

"Ah! it is madame," said Rosalie, opening the door. "I was beginning to be uneasy."

And taking the umbrella to place it on the sink-stone in the kitchen, she added:

"Eh! what a rain! — Zéphyrin, who has just arrived, is as wet as soup — I took it on myself to keep him for dinner, madame. He has leave until ten o'clock."

Hélène mechanically followed her. It seemed to her that she must make an inspection of all her rooms, before taking off her hat.

"You have done well, my girl," she replied.

For an instant, she stood on the kitchen threshold, looking at the lighted stoves. Instinctively, she opened the door of a closet and shut it again. All the furniture was in its place; she saw it all again, and that gave her pleasure. Zéphyrin had meantime arisen respectfully. She smiled, while slightly nodding to him.

"I did not feel sure if I ought to put on the roast," the housemaid continued.

"What o'clock is it, then?" she asked.

"Why it's almost seven, madame."

"What! seven o'clock!"

She was greatly astonished and stood motionless. She had lost consciousness of the time. This was a reawakening.

"What about Jeanne?" she asked.

"Oh! she has been very good, madame. I think that she must have gone to sleep, for I have not even heard her."

"You have not given her a light, then?"

Rosalie was embarrassed, as she did not wish to confess that Zéphyrin had brought her some interesting pictures. Mademoiselle had not stirred, so she could not have wanted anything. But Hélène no longer heeded her. She entered her room, where a dread chill seized her.

"Jeanne! Jeanne!" she called.

No voice answered. She struck against an arm-chair. Through the dining-room door, which she had left half-open, some light fell on a corner of the carpet. She felt a shiver creep over her, it might have been thought that the rain was falling

in the room, with its damp air and continuous trickling. Then, on turning, she perceived the pale square formed by the window against the gray of the sky.

"Who, then, opened that window?" she exclaimed. "Jeanne! Jeanne!"

Still no response. A mortal dread weighed upon her heart. She would examine that window; but, on groping about it, her hand rested on a head of hair, Jeanne was there. And, as Rosalie entered with a lamp, the child was seen, very pale, sleeping with her cheek on her crossed arms, whilst the drops as they fell from the roof splashed over her. Her breathing was not observable, so exhausted was she with despair and fatigue. Two huge tears were still clinging to the lashes that fringed her bluish eyelids.

"Unfortunate child!" Hélène stammered, "that it should be allowed! — My God! she is quite cold! — To go to sleep there, and in such weather, when she had been forbidden to touch the window! — Jeanne, Jeanne, answer me, wake up!"





Rosalie had prudently slipped away. The mother had raised the little one in her arms, but her head drooped, as if unable to shake off the leaden sleep that had taken possession of her. At last, however, she opened her lids; but she remained benumbed and stupefied, her eyes pained by the lamp.

"Jeanne, it is I —— What ails you? —— Look ——, I have just come back."

But she did not understand, and merely murmured in a dazed manner:

"Ah! —— ah! ——"

She examined her mother as if she did not recognize her. Then, suddenly she shivered, as if conscious that the room was extremely cold. Her consciousness was returning and the tears released from the lids rolled down her cheeks. She commenced to struggle, showing her dislike to be touched by any one.

"It is you, it is you —— Oh! let me alone, you are squeezing me too tightly. I was so comfortable."

Having slipped from her mother's arms, she felt afraid of her. With a restless look, she glanced

from her hands to her shoulders; one hand was ungloved, she recoiled from the bare wrist, the moist palm, the warm fingers, with all the repugnance that she felt when caressed by a strange hand. There was no longer the familiar odor of vervain, Hélène's fingers must have been stretched, the palm was soft; she was exasperated at the touch of that skin which seemed to her to be so changed.

"Come, I am not scolding you," Hélène continued. "But, truly, is this behaving well? — Kiss me."

Jeanne still shrank from her. She did not remember having seen her mother wear that dress or that cloak. The belt was loose and the folds fell in a way that irritated her. Why, then, did she return so badly dressed and withal so ugly and sad in all respects? There was mud on her skirt too, her shoes were burst, and nothing fitted her figure, as she herself said, when she was angry at little girls who did not know how to dress.

"Kiss me, Jeanne."

The child could not recognize the voice either, it seemed stronger. She glanced at the countenance, she was astonished at the contracted, weary look of the eyes, at the feverish redness of the lips, at the strange shadow that clouded the entire face. She did not like that, and the pain within her breast, as when any one grieved her, again attacked her. Then, enervated by the nearness of those subtle and terrible evils that she scented, and realizing that she was breathing the air of treachery, she burst out into sobs.

“No, no, I entreat you — Oh! you left me alone, oh! I was too unhappy —”

“But now I have come back, my darling — Do not weep, I am back.”

“No, no, it is all over — I want you no more — Oh! I waited and waited, I have suffered too much.”

Hélène had taken her up again, and was drawing her gently to her, but the child was stubborn, repeating:

“No, no, it is not the same thing, you are not the same.”

"What? What are you saying, my child?"

"I do not know, you are not the same."

"Do you mean to say that I love you no longer?"

"I do not know, you are not the same — Do not say no — You do not seem to me to be the same. It is all over, over, over. I want to die."

Hélène, with blanched cheeks, was holding her again in her arms. Her countenance betrayed her, then? She kissed her, but the little one shuddered, with a look of such profound uneasiness that she did not press a second kiss on her brow. She kept her, however. Neither of them spoke further. Jeanne was silently weeping, but she grew rigid from the nervous revolt that agitated her. Hélène considered that it was not necessary to attach importance to the caprices of children. In truth, however, she was secretly ashamed, and the pressure of her daughter's weight on her shoulder caused the blood to mount to her cheek. Then she laid Jeanne down on the floor; it was a relief to both.

"Now, be good, wipe your eyes," H  l  ne continued. "We will set all that right."

The child obeyed, manifesting great docility, but she was a little timid and looked stealthily at her mother. But, suddenly, she was shaken by a violent fit of coughing.

"Oh! God! you are ill, now. Really, I cannot stay away a second — Did you feel cold?"

"Yes, mamma, in the back."

"Here! put on this shawl. The dining-room stove is lighted. You will soon get warm — Are you hungry?"

Jeanne hesitated. She was about to tell the truth, to answer no; but she again glanced covertly at her mother, and drawing back, said in an undertone:

"Yes, mamma."

"Come, it will be nothing," declared H  l  ne, who wished to reassure herself. "But I entreat you, you naughty child, do not cause me any more of these frights."

On Rosalie's return to announce that the dinner was ready, H  l  ne harshly scolded her. The little housemaid bowed her head, muttering that it was

quite true, that she should have taken more care of mademoiselle. Then, to calm Hélène, she assisted her to undress. Good heavens! madame was in a pretty condition! Jeanne was watching the garments one by one as they fell, as if she were questioning them, and as if expecting to see the secret that was being concealed from her, escape from those mud-stained linens. The string of a petticoat was especially difficult to untie; Rosalie had to work for an instant to undo the knot; and the child drew nearer, curiously attracted, sharing the housemaid's impatience, angry too with that knot and full of curiosity to know how it was tied. But she could not remain near, and took refuge behind an arm-chair, away from the garments whose warmth annoyed her. She turned away her head. Her mother's change of dress had never thus troubled her.

"Madame ought to feel comfortable now," said Rosalie. "It is very pleasant to have on dry clothes after getting wet."

When Hélène had on her blue swansdown dressing-gown she sighed lightly, as if she really

experienced a new comfort. Once more she was home, and relieved from the burden of those heavy garments. It was in vain that the housemaid repeated that the soup was on the table, she would wash her face and her hands in plenty of water. When she was quite fresh and while still wet, with her dressing-gown buttoned to her chin, Jeanne crept back close to her and taking hold of her hand, kissed it.

At table, however, the mother and the daughter did not speak. The stove roared, the little dining-room looked cheerful with its shining mahogany and its bright porcelains. But H  l  ne seemed to have relapsed into that torpor that banished thought; she ate mechanically, with some appearance of appetite. Jeanne, facing her, slyly watched her over her glass, not permitting one of her movements to escape her. She coughed, and her mother, who had lost consciousness of her presence, at once became uneasy.

“What! you are coughing again! — You are not getting warm, then?”

“Oh! yes, mamma, I am very warm.”

Hélène felt her hand to see whether she was speaking the truth. Then she noticed that her plate remained full.

"You said that you were hungry — You do not like it, then?"

"Oh! yes, mamma, I am eating."

Jeanne made an effort and swallowed a mouthful. Hélène watched her for a moment, then her mind wandered away to that darkened room. The child grasped the fact that she counted for nothing. By the time that the meal drew to a close, her poor, aching body had sunk on the chair, she resembled a little old woman, and her eyes were dim like those of very old maids whom no one will ever love.

"Won't mademoiselle take some of the preserve?" Rosalie asked. "If not, may I take away the cover?"

Hélène sat there gazing vacantly.

"Mamma, I am sleepy," said Jeanne, in a changed voice. "Will you let me lie down? — I should feel better in bed."

Once more her mother seemed to wake with a start.

"You are suffering, my darling! Where are you suffering? speak, then!"

"Oh, no, when I tell you! — I am sleepy, it is really time to go to bed."

She left her chair and stood up again, as if to make it evident that she was not ill. Her little numbed feet stumbled as she tried to cross the floor. She leaned on the furniture, she had sufficient strength of purpose not to weep, in spite of the fire that was burning within her. Her mother came to put her into bed; but she could only tie her hair for the night, for the child threw off her clothes so hurriedly. Unaided, she slipped between the sheets, and quickly shut her eyes.

"Are you comfortable?" H  l  ne asked, as she raised the coverings and tucked them around her.

"Very comfortable. Leave me, do not move me — Take away the light."

Her only desire was to be in the dark, that she might reopen her eyes and feel all her sorrow, without any one to look at her. When the lamp had been removed, she opened her eyes quite wide.

Hélène, meantime, was pacing to and fro beside her. She had a strange desire to move about, and could not bear the thought of lying down. She looked at the clock; twenty minutes of nine, what was she to do? She rummaged in a drawer, but forgot what she was looking for. Then she approached the book-case, glanced over the books, without deciding on reading one, the mere perusal of the titles wearying her. The very silence of the room buzzed in her ears; its solitude, its heavy air were becoming a torture to her. She would have welcomed noise, people, anything that would take her away from herself. Twice she listened at the door of the small room where Jeanne lay so still that not even her breathing could be heard. Everything was asleep, she turned back again, displacing and replacing the articles that came in her way. Suddenly she remembered that Zéphyrin must still be with Rosalie. This comforted her, and delighted at the idea of not being alone, she shuffled in her slippers toward the kitchen.

She had reached the anteroom and was already pushing the glass door of the little passage when

she unexpectedly heard the resonant smack of a masterly box on the ear, and Rosalie's voice exclaimed:

"Eh! you will pinch me again, perhaps! — Down with your paws!"

Then Zéphyrin answered in husky tones:

"That is nothing, my beauty, it is to show how I love you — And so is this —"

But the door creaked. When Hélène entered, the little soldier and the cook were seated at table quite peacefully, their noses bent low over their plates. They were feigning indifference, they had done nothing. Nevertheless, they were very red, their eyes blazed like candles, and they shuffled about on their straw-seated chairs. Rosalie got up hurriedly.

"Does madame desire anything?"

Hélène had not prepared any pretext. She came to see them, to chat, to have some company. But a feeling of shame overcame her and she did not dare to say that she wanted nothing.

"Have you any warm water?" she asked at last.

"No, madame, and my fire is going out —— Oh! that won't matter, I will give it to you in five minutes. It boils very quickly."

She added some charcoal, and put on the kettle. Then, seeing that her mistress was remaining there, on the threshold, she said:

"In five minutes, madame, I will bring it to you."

Then Hélène, with an indifferent gesture, said:

"I'm not in a hurry, I will wait —— Do not disturb yourself, my girl; eat, eat —— That lad will have to return to his barracks."

Rosalie consented to sit down again. Zéphyrin, who remained standing, saluted in military fashion and again cut his meat, spreading out his elbows, to show that he knew how to behave. When they were eating thus together, after madame's dinner, they did not even draw the table into the middle of the kitchen, they preferred to sit side by side with their noses turned toward the wall. In this way they could nudge each other's knees, pinch each other, and prolong their smacks without losing a morsel; then, too, if they raised their eyes, they had the cheering view of the

saucepans. A bunch of laurel and thyme hung near them, and the spice-box shed its piquant odor around. The kitchen, which was not yet put in order, displayed about them the remains of the dessert; but it was none the less agreeable for lovers with sharpened appetites and afforded a comforting substitute for the things that were never served at the barracks. The roast was especially noticeable, seasoned with a sprinkling of vinegar, the vinegar of the salad. The gaslight was reflected in quivering gleams by the coppers and other kitchen utensils. As the stove was getting unbearably warm, they had opened the window, and fresh puffs of wind, coming from the garden, swelled out the blue cotton curtain.

"Must you get back at ten o'clock precisely?"
Hélène asked.

"Yes, madame, saving your presence," Zéphyrin replied.

"It is quite a distance! — You take the omnibus?"

"Oh! madame, occasionally — But, you see, a good little gymnastic swing goes still better."

She had advanced a step into the kitchen, and was leaning against the dresser, her clasped hands resting on her dressing-gown. She still talked about the wretched weather they had had that day, about the rations at the regimental barracks, and about the high price of eggs. But after answering each question the conversation ceased. She embarrassed them, standing thus behind their backs; they did not even turn around, but muttered their replies in their plates, stooping under her looks, whilst they swallowed in very small mouthfuls, so as to be polite. H  l  ne became quite calm and felt quite comfortable there.

"Do not get impatient, madame," said Rosalie, "there's the kettle singing already — If the fire was brighter —"

H  l  ne would not allow her to disturb herself. It would be all right soon. She only felt her limbs terribly weak. She crossed the kitchen in a mechanical manner and drew near to the window, where she saw the third chair, a wooden chair and very high, which, being turned over, could be converted into a stool. She did not sit

down at once, for she had noticed a heap of pictures lying on the corner of the table.

"Look!" she said, picking them up, impelled by the desire to please Zéphyrin.

The little soldier grinned without speaking a word. He was radiant with smiles, his look followed the prints as they were exposed to view and when a more than usually attractive subject came under the lady's notice he nodded his head approvingly.

"That one," he said, suddenly, "I found in the Rue du Temple — It is a beautiful woman and there are flowers in her basket —"

Hélène had sat down. She was examining the beautiful woman that adorned a pastille box, all gilded and varnished, which Zéphyrin had carefully wiped. Over the back of the chair hung a dishcloth that kept her from leaning back. She threw it aside, and plunged afresh into her subject. Then the two lovers, on seeing the lady so considerate, felt no longer embarrassed, they even came to forget her presence, at last. Hélène had let the pictures fall on her knees, one by one; and,

smiling vaguely, she watched them and listened to their conversation.

"Tell me, dear," murmured the cook, "won't you take some more of this leg of mutton?"

He made no definite reply, but he swung himself to and fro as if some one had tickled him, then he stretched himself out at his ease when she put a thick slice on his plate. His red epaulettes danced, while his spherical head, which rose within the circle of a yellow collar and from which a huge pair of ears jutted out, shook like that of an ape. His back shook from the violence of his laughter and he was almost bursting within his tunic, which out of respect for the lady he never unbuttoned in the kitchen.

"This is better than old Rouvet's radishes," he said at last with his mouth full.

That was a reminder of the country. Both burst out laughing; and Rosalie clung to the table so as not to fall. One day, previous to their first communion, Zéphyrin had stolen three radishes from old Rouvet; they were very tough radishes, however, oh! tough enough to break one's teeth;

but Rosalie, all the same, had crunched her share, behind the school-house. So it was, that every time that they ate together, Zéphyrin never failed to say:

“This is better than old Rouvet’s radishes.”

Every time this was repeated Rosalie laughed so heartily that she broke the string of her skirt, and so violently that the breaking could be heard.

“Eh! you have broken it?” asked the little soldier, triumphantly.

He stretched out his hands to find out. He received only a cuff.

“Keep quiet, you are not likely to mend it—— It is stupid to be snapping the strings. I put a new one on every week.”

Then, as he was still trying to ascertain, she seized the flesh of his hand between her fat fingers and twisted it. This pretty little passage had the effect of whetting his desire still more, so with a furious glance, she pointed to the lady, who was looking at them. Without being very much worried, he distended his cheek with an enormous

mouthful of food, winked his eye with the expression of an accomplished trooper, and looked as if he would say that women, not even ladies, were not averse to such fun. Certainly it always gives pleasure to watch lovers.

"You have still five years to serve in the ranks?" H  l  ne asked, sinking down upon the high wooden chair, forgetting herself in a moment of tenderness.

"Yes, madame, perhaps only four, if they do not need me."

Rosalie supposed that the lady was thinking of her marriage. She interrupted, and affecting to be angry, exclaimed:

"Oh! madame, he can stay ten years more, I will not ask the government for him. He is becoming too knowing. I really think that they are debauching him — Yes, it is all very well for you to laugh. But, with me, that does not take. In the presence of the mayor, we shall see what there is to jest about."

He only giggled still more, so as to pose as a rake before madame, and the cook became quite angry.

"Be off, I advise you! You know, madame, at bottom he is but a simpleton. One has no idea how stupid the uniform makes them. They are the airs that he puts on with his comrades. If I put him out of doors, you would hear him weeping on the stairway — I snap my fingers at you, my little man! When I desire, will you not be always at hand, to perform my smallest wish?"

She was eyeing him quite closely; but on seeing him thus, with his good-natured, freckled countenance that was beginning to manifest uneasiness, she suddenly relented. Without apparent transition, she continued:

"Ah! I did not tell you, I have received a letter from my aunt — The Guignards would like to sell their house. Yes, almost for nothing. We might be able, perhaps, later on —"

"Zounds!" said Zéphyrin, beaming with pleasure, "one would be at home in that place. There is convenience for keeping two cows."

Then they were silent. They partook of the dessert. The little soldier was licking some grape-jelly

from his bread with childish zest, whilst the cook was carefully peeling an apple with a maternal air. He, however, had slipped his disengaged hand under the table, and was stroking her on the knees, but so gently that she feigned not to feel it. As long as he behaved himself, she was not angry. She must have even liked it, for although she did not expressly acknowledge it, she showed her pleasure by slight starts from time to time. That day was a perfect feast.

"Madame, your water is boiling now," said Rosalie after a silence.

Hélène did not leave. She felt as if their tenderness enveloped her. She extended their dreams, she imagined them yonder in the Guignard's house, with their two cows. It made her smile, to watch him sitting there so serious, with his hand under the table all the while, whilst Rosalie remained severely rigid, so as not to betray the situation. Their difference of station seemed to have vanished, she had no clear consciousness of herself or of the others, of where she was or of what she had just done. The coppers shone on the

walls, she was chained to the spot by sympathy, and her face betrayed her feelings, nor did she feel any displeasure at the disorder of the kitchen. Her condescension filled her with the joy arising from a satisfied desire. She was, however, very warm and the heat of the stove brought drops of perspiration to her pale brow; behind her the half-opened window admitted cooling air that played deliciously on her neck.

"Madame, your water is boiling," Rosalie repeated. "There will soon be none left in the kettle."

And she placed the kettle in front of her. Hélène, for an instant surprised, felt compelled to rise.

"Ah! yes — I thank you."

She had no further pretext, so she went away slowly and regretfully. When she reached her room she found the kettle in her way. She felt the outbreak of a matured passion. The lethargy which had held her so stupidly, melted, and its flood of burning life flowed within her like a fire. She trembled at the thought of the passionate joys that she had not known. Reminiscences occurred to her, and she felt that all too late her

senses were awakening, accompanied by an intense unsatisfied desire. There in the middle of the room, she stretched out at full length, raising and twisting her hands, till her weakened limbs cracked. Oh! she loved him, she desired him, she would yield herself thus on the next occasion.

At the moment that she was taking off her dressing-gown and looking at her bare arms, a noise disturbed her, she thought that Jeanne had coughed. Then she took the lamp. The child, however, had her eyelids closed and seemed asleep. No sooner had her reassured mother turned her back than she opened her black eyes quite wide, and followed her mother's steps as she returned to the other room. She was not yet asleep nor did she wish them to put her to sleep. A further attack of coughing tortured her throat, and she buried her head under the covering, almost stifling herself. She could go away now, her mother would not notice it. She lay in the dark with her eyes open, but conscious of all, as if she had just been reflecting upon it, and it was killing her without a murmur.

II

The next day H  l  ne had all sorts of practical ideas. She awoke with the sense of an imperious need of watching over her own happiness, and shuddering at the dread of losing Henri by some imprudence. At the chilly morning hour, whilst the drowsy room was still silent, she felt that she adored him, she longed for him with all the passion of her being. She had never felt so anxious to act with circumspection. Her first thought was that she ought to see Juliette that very morning. She would thus avoid tiresome explanations and inquiries that might compromise everything.

When she arrived at Madame Deberle's, about nine o'clock, she found her already up, pale-faced, and with eyes as red as those of the heroine in a drama. As soon as she saw her, the poor woman threw herself into her arms weeping, calling her her

good angel. She did not love Malignon at all, oh ! she swore it ! Heavens ! what a stupid adventure ! She would surely die of it ! for she did not now feel herself in the least fitted for those intrigues, lies, sufferings, and tyrannies of an unvarying sentiment. How good it seemed to find herself free again ! She laughed from joy ; then she sobbed anew while supplicating her friend not to despise her. At the bottom of her feverish anxiety, a fear lurked, she believed that her husband knew everything. The evening before, he came home agitated. She overwhelmed H  l  ne with questions. The latter, with an audacity and facility that astonished herself, told her a story, the copious details of which she invented one by one, without hesitation. She swore to her that her husband did not suspect anything. It was she who had learned all and wishing to save her she had conceived the plan of disturbing the meeting. Juliette listened to her, accepted that explanation, and beamed with the joyous satisfaction that smiled through her tears. She threw herself once more on her neck. H  l  ne was by no means embarrassed by her caresses, for

she felt none of the conscientious scruples that had formerly tortured her. When she left her, after having made her promise to be calm, she laughed inwardly at her adroitness, and went away delighted.

Some days passed. H  l  ne's whole life was out of joint; in thought she no longer lived at home, but at Henri's. Nothing existed but the neighboring little house, there it was that her heart beat. On any pretext, she ran there, forgetting herself, satisfied if only she could breathe the same air. In that first rapture of possession, the sight of Juliette softened her feelings as she regarded her as a dependence of Henri. He, however, had not yet been able to meet her for an instant alone. She seemed to take special pains to delay the hour of the second meeting. Only, one evening, as he was escorting her to the vestibule, she had made him swear not to visit again the house in the Passage des Eaux, adding that he would compromise her. Both shuddered at the thought of the passionate embrace which they would again enjoy, they knew not where, but somewhere, one

night. Haunted by that desire, H  l  ne lived only for that minute, indifferent to all others, passing her days hoping for it, her happiness marred only by Jeanne's cough ringing constantly in her ears.

Jeanne's cough was dry and frequent, and increased toward evening. It was then, too, that she had slight attacks of fever, and her perspiration during sleep weakened her. When her mother questioned her, she answered that she was not ill, that she was not suffering. It was no doubt the wind-up of a cold. H  l  ne, pacified by this explanation and no longer clearly understanding what was going on about her, preserved, however, amid the rapture that filled her life, the vague feeling of a sorrow, a sort of weight whose pressure made her bleed somewhere, she could not tell where. Sometimes, in the midst of those causeless joys that suffused her with tenderness, she was overwhelmed with anxiety, it seemed to her that some misfortune was following her. She turned around and smiled. When one is too happy, one always trembles. No one was there.

Jeanne had just coughed, but she was taking some tisane, it would be nothing.

However, one afternoon, old Doctor Bodin, who came as a friend of the household, had prolonged his visit, as he was anxious about Jeanne and was carefully examining her by stealthy glances with his little blue eyes. He questioned her under the cover of playful remarks. He made no comment on that day. Two days later, he appeared again; and, this time, without examining Jeanne, with the cheerful amiability of an old man who has seen many things and places, he turned the conversation on travel. Earlier in life, he had served as a military surgeon; he was familiar with every scene in Italy. It was a superb country which should be seen in the spring to be admired. Why did not Madame Grandjean take her daughter there? He succeeded in this way, after skilful transitions, in advising them to make a stay in the land of the sun, as he called it. Hélène was looking at him fixedly. He disclaimed the suggestion that either of them was ill, certainly not! only it would rejuvenate them to enjoy a change of air.

Hélène had become quite pale, and a deathly chill crept over her at the thought of leaving Paris. *Mon Dieu!* to go away so far, so far! to lose Henri suddenly, to leave their love without a morrow! The thought was so agonizing that she leaned over Jeanne to conceal her trouble. Would Jeanne like to go? The child had clasped her little fingers as if they were chilly. Oh! yes, she would indeed! she would very much like to go into the land of sunshine, all alone, she and her mother, oh! all alone! and on her poor emaciated countenance, whose cheeks burned with fever, the hope of a new life radiated. But Hélène no longer listened, she was rebellious and suspicious, firmly believing that everybody, the Abbé, Doctor Bodin, Jeanne herself, had conspired to separate her from Henri. Noticing her pallor, the old physician suspected that he had spoken imprudently; he therefore hastened to say that there was no hurry, though fully resolved to return to that conversation.

It happened that Madame Deberle was to have stayed at home that day. As soon as the doctor

had left, Hélène hurried to put on her hat. Jeanne refused to go out; she felt better near the fire; she would be very good, and would not open the window. For some time past, she had not tormented her mother to be permitted to accompany her, contented to follow her with a lingering glance. Then, when alone, she huddled herself on her chair and remained thus for hours, without changing her position.

"Mamma, is it far to Italy?" she asked, when Hélène drew near to kiss her.

"Oh! very far, my pet."

Jeanne clung to her neck. She did not let her rise at once and murmured:

"Well, Rosalie could attend to your affairs here. We should not need her —— You see, with a moderate-sized trunk —— Oh! it would be fine, little mother! Nobody but us two! —— I should come back quite stout, see! like this."

She puffed out her cheeks and rounded her arms. Hélène said that they would see, and then made her escape, instructing Rosalie to keep a good watch over mademoiselle. The child coiled

herself up in the chimney-corner, looking at the blazing fire and buried in reverie. From time to time, she put out her hands mechanically, to warm them. The brightness of the flame strained her large eyes. She was so absorbed that she did not hear Monsieur Rambaud enter. His visits were more frequent now; he came, he said, on behalf of that paralytic woman whom Doctor Deberle had not yet been able to get into the Home for Incurables. When he found Jeanne was alone, he sat down in the opposite corner of the chimney, and chatted with her as if she were a grown-up person. It was very annoying, that poor woman had been waiting a week; but he would go down himself in a little while to see the doctor, who would perhaps give him an answer. Still he did not stir.

"Your mother has not taken you, then?" he asked.

Jeanne shrugged her shoulders with a very weary air. It upset her too much to visit other people. Nothing now gave her any pleasure.

Then she added:

"I am getting old, I cannot be always playing — Mamma amuses herself outside, and I find amusement within; so we are not together."

Silence followed. The child shivered and held her hands out towards the fire which was burning with a great rosy flare; and in fact she did resemble an old woman, muffled up as she was in an immense shawl, with a silk handkerchief around her neck and another around her head. Wrapped in all that clothing, she created the impression that she was no bigger than a sick bird, panting beneath its ruffled feathers. Monsieur Rambaud had his hands clasped over his knees, and watched the fire. Then, turning towards Jeanne, he asked her if her mother went out the evening before. She nodded affirmatively. And the evening before that? and the day before? She always answered yes, with a nod of the head. Her mother went out every day. Then Monsieur Rambaud and the little one looked at each other for a long time, with pale and grave countenances, as if they shared a great sorrow. They did not speak of it, because a little girl and an old man could not talk of it

together, but they well knew why they were so sad and why they liked to sit thus to right and to left of the fire-place, when they were alone in the house. It comforted them immensely. In drawing near each other they felt their neglect mitigated. Outbursts of tenderness surprised them, and they felt impelled to embrace and weep together.

"You are cold, my kind friend, I am sure of it — Get nearer to the fire."

"No, indeed, my darling, I am not cold."

"Oh! that is untrue, your hands are frozen — Come closer or I shall be angry."

Then he grew uneasy in his turn.

"I wager that they have left you no tisane — I am going to make some for you, do you want it? Oh! I know very well how to make it — If I were nursing you, you would see, you would not want for anything."

He did not allow himself to speak more definitely. Jeanne answered sharply that the tisane disgusted her; they made her drink too much of it. However, occasionally, she consented to Monsieur Rambaud's busying himself about her, like a mother; he

would slip a pillow under her shoulders, give her the potion that she was forgetting, or lead her about the bedroom leaning on his arm. These little attentions filled them with tenderness. As Jeanne said, looking at him with penetrating glances whose flashes greatly disturbed the good man, they were playing the papa and the little daughter, in the absence of her mother. Sudden fits of sadness, however, would depress them, they would lapse into silence, examining each other stealthily, full of pity for each other.

On that day, after a prolonged silence, the child repeated the question that she had already put to her mother:

“Is it far to Italy?”

“Oh! I should say so, indeed,” said Monsieur Rambaud. “It is away yonder, behind Marseilles, the deuce —— Why do you ask me that?”

“Because ——,” she declared gravely.

Then she complained of knowing nothing. She was always ill, they had never sent her to a boarding-school. Both became silent, the intense heat of the fire making them drowsy.

Meantime, Hélène had found Madame Deberle and her sister Pauline in the Japanese pavilion, where they often passed the afternoon. It was very warm there, a radiator spreading a stifling heat. The large windows were shut, and the narrow garden was visible in its winter array, like some large sepia sketch finished with marvelous touch, the little black branches of the trees standing out clearly against the brown earth. The two sisters were engaged in a warm dispute.

"Let me be quiet, then!" exclaimed Juliette, "our manifest interest is to support Turkey."

"Well, I have talked with a Russian," replied Pauline, quite as warmly. "They like us immensely at St. Petersburg, our true allies are on that side."

But Juliette assumed a grave air, and, crossing her arms:

"Then, what will you do with the European balance of power?"

The Eastern question was stirring Paris, it formed the staple of current conversation, every woman who moved at all in society could not consistently

speaking of anything else. And so, for two days past, Madame Deberle plunged with eagerness into foreign politics. She had very decided ideas on the many eventualities that threatened to crop up. Her sister Pauline incensed her greatly, because of her eccentric idea of upholding Russia, contrary to the evident interests of France. She wanted to convince her of her mistake, then she became angry.

"Stop! be quiet, you are talking like a fool. If you had only studied the question with me ——"

She stopped to greet H  l  ne, who entered at this moment.

"Good-day, my dear. It is very kind of you to come. You have no news probably. This morning's talk is of an ultimatum. The sitting of the House of Commons was an excited one."

"No, I know nothing," replied H  l  ne, who was astonished at the question. "I go out so little!"

Moreover, Juliette had not waited for the answer. She was explaining to Pauline why it was necessary to neutralize the Black Sea, familiarly mentioning from time to time, in the course of her remarks,

English and Russian generals, whose names she pronounced faultlessly. But Henri had just appeared, bringing a package of newspapers. Hélène surmised that he came on her account. Their eyes had sought each other and they earnestly gazed at each other with lingering glances. Then followed a long, silent grasp during which they were each absorbed in the other.

"What is there in the newspapers?" Juliette asked feverishly.

"In the newspapers, my dear?" said the doctor; "why, there is never anything."

Then for an instant they forgot the Eastern question. Frequent references were made to some one whom they expected but who did not arrive. Pauline remarked that it was about to strike three. Oh! he would come, Madame Deberle asserted; he had promised too formally; but she named no one. Hélène listened without understanding. All that was not connected with Henri did not interest her. She now brought no work, her visits lasted two hours, but she was a stranger to the conversation, her mind was often occupied with the same

childish dream, in which the others disappeared by a miracle and she was left alone with him. Still she answered Juliette, when she questioned her, while Henri's eyes, always directed to hers, plunged her into a delightful languor. He passed behind her, as if to raise one of the blinds, and she clearly realized that he was seeking a meeting, for she saw the tremble of excitement he felt when he brushed against her hair. She signified her willingness, she no longer had the strength to wait.

"There is a ring, it must be he," said Pauline, suddenly.

The two sisters assumed an air of indifference. Malignon presented himself, dressed more faultlessly than usual, but with a trace of seriousness in his look. He shook the hands that were extended toward him; he did not display his customary banter, but returned ceremoniously to the house that he had not visited for some time past. Whilst the doctor and Pauline were complaining of the rarity of his visits, Juliette bent toward H  l  ne, who, despite her sovereign indifference, remained surprised, and whispered:

“Eh! it astonishes you? — *Mon Dieu!* I do not feel angry with him. He is such a good fellow at heart that one cannot long remain angry — Just think! he has unearthed a husband for Pauline — It is very kind, don’t you think so?”

“No doubt,” Hélène murmured complaisantly.

“Yes, one of his friends, very rich, who did not think of marrying, but whom he has sworn to bring to us — We were waiting for him to-day so as to have the final answer — So, you understand, I have had to overlook quite a number of things. Oh! there is no danger now, we know each other.”

She smiled sweetly and blushed slightly at the recollections she awoke; then, she quickly took possession of Malignon. Hélène smiled also. Those familiarities in life formed an excuse for herself. It was wrong to muse upon dark dramas, everything ended with delightful simplicity. But, whilst she was thus tasting a cowardly happiness in considering that nothing was forbidden, Juliette and Pauline just opened the pavilion door and were drawing Malignon after them into the garden.

All at once, she heard Henri's voice behind her whispering in her ear low and passionate tones :

"I entreat you, H  l  ne, oh ! I entreat you ——"

She started and glanced around her with a sudden fear. They were quite alone, she perceived the other three walking slowly along one of the paths. Henri had dared to lay his hand on her shoulder, and she trembled, but in her terror she felt intoxicated with joy.

"When you wish," she stammered, clearly understanding by his action that he desired a meeting.

They exchanged a few hurried words.

"Wait for me this evening, in that house in the Passage des Eaux."

"No, I cannot —— I have explained to you, you have sworn to me ——"

"Elsewhere, then, wherever you please, provided I see you —— Shall it be at your house to-night?"

The idea was repugnant to her. But she could refuse only by a gesture, as she was again overcome by fear on seeing the two women and Malignon returning. Madame Deberle had led the

young man away in order as she pretended to show him a rarity, some wonderful tufts of violets in full bloom despite the cold weather. She quickened her pace and beaming with smiles, entered in advance of the others.

"It is settled!" she said.

"What is?" asked Hélène, still quite upset and unable to recall anything.

"Oh, that marriage! — Ah! what a riddance! Pauline was becoming very disagreeable — The young man has seen her and thinks her charming. To-morrow, we shall all dine at papa's — I could have hugged Malignon for his good news."

Henri, with perfect sang-froid, had managed to move away from Hélène. He also thought Malignon was a charming fellow. He shared his wife's delight at seeing their little sister settled at last. Then he called Hélène's attention to the fact that she was going to drop one of her gloves. She thanked him. They heard Pauline jesting in the garden; she was leaning toward Malignon, whispering broken phrases in his ear, and laughing

boisterously at his whispered replies. No doubt he was giving her some information in confidence as to her future spouse.

The door of the pavilion was open, and H  l  ne inhaled the cold air with delight.

It was at that moment that Jeanne and Monsieur Rambaud grew silent in the bedroom, overcome with drowsiness by the intense heat of the fire. The child broke the protracted silence by asking suddenly, as if the question had been the conclusion of her reverie :

"Would you like to go into the kitchen — We will see if we can get sight of mamma."

"I should, indeed," answered Monsieur Rambaud.

Jeanne was stronger that day. She went into the kitchen without help, and leaned her face against a pane. Monsieur Rambaud also looked out into the garden. All the leaves had disappeared and the interior of the Japanese pavilion was plainly seen through the large clear panes.

Rosalie, who was watching the soup, considered mademoiselle curious.

But the child had recognized her mother's dress ; and pointing to her, she pressed her face against the pane in order to get a better view.

Meanwhile, Pauline looked up and signalled.

Hélène appeared, and beckoned to her to join them.

"They have noticed you, mademoiselle," the cook said. "They are asking you to go down."

Monsieur Rambaud had to open the window. Every one asked him to bring Jeanne. But Jeanne fled into her room, angrily refusing to go, accusing her kind friend of having purposely tapped against the pane. She enjoyed looking at her mother, but she would not go into that house again ; and, to all the pleading questions that Monsieur Rambaud put to her, she replied with her uncompromising "because," which conveyed everything.

"You should not be the one to compel me," she said at last, with a gloomy look.

But he insisted that she was grieving her mother, that one could not act foolishly towards others. He would wrap her up well, she would not feel cold ; and, while speaking thus, he fastened the

shawl around her waist, and taking off the silk handkerchief that she had on her head, he replaced it by a knitted hood. When she was ready, she again protested against being taken. At last she allowed herself to be carried down on his undertaking to bring her back immediately, should she feel poorly. The janitress opened the door that led from one house to the other, and as they entered the garden they were greeted with joyous exclamations. Madame Deberle manifested particular tenderness towards Jeanne, she installed her in an arm-chair, near the radiator, and had all the windows shut at once, explaining that the air was rather too keen for the dear child.

Malignon had left.

As H  l  ne smoothed the child's straggling hair, somewhat ashamed to see her wrapped in a shawl and hood in company, Juliette exclaimed :

"Don't disturb her ! are we not a family party ? — Poor little Jeanne ! we only lacked her."

She rang, and asked if Miss Smithson and Lucien had returned from their daily walk.

They had not returned.

Then, too, Lucien was becoming unbearable, he had made the five Levasseur girls cry the evening before.

"Would you like to play at 'feathers'?" asked Pauline, whose coming marriage was turning her head. "It is not tiring."

But Jeanne nodded in *réfusal*. Between her drooping lids, she glanced about at the people for a long time.

The doctor had just told Monsieur Rambaud that his protégée had at last been admitted to the Home for Incurables, and the latter in his emotion grasped his hands as if he had received a great personal favor.

Every one was lounging in an arm-chair and the conversation assumed a tone of charming intimacy. The chatting was continued in an easy way, broken at times by moments of silence. As Madame Deberle and her sister chatted together, Hélène said to the two men:

"Doctor Bodin has advised us to take a trip to Italy."

"Ah! that is why Jeanne questioned me!" exclaimed Monsieur Rambaud. "It would give you pleasure, then, to go there?"

The child, without answering, clasped her two little hands on her bosom, whilst her gray face beamed with pleasure. She looked timidly toward the doctor, for she concluded that her mother was consulting him. He had started slightly, but remained quite passive. Suddenly, Juliette launched into the conversation, wishing, as was her wont, to take part in everything.

"What's that? are you speaking of Italy? — Did you not say that you are leaving for Italy? — Ah, well! the coincidence is odd! This very morning, I was tormenting Henri to take me to Naples — Fancy! for the last ten years I have dreamt of seeing Naples. Every spring, he promises me, but he never keeps faith."

"I did not tell you that I would not —," murmured the doctor.

"What, you did not tell me? — Why, you flatly refused, explaining to me that you could not leave your patients."

Jeanne was listening.

A deep wrinkle furrowed her pure brow, and she twisted her fingers mechanically, one after the other.

"Oh! my patients," the doctor continued, "I could very well entrust them for a few weeks to a confrère — If I thought I could afford you so great a pleasure —"

"Doctor," Hélène interrupted, "do you also think that such a journey would be beneficial to Jeanne?"

"It would be excellent, it would put her completely on her feet again — Children are always the better for a journey."

"Then," Juliette exclaimed, "we will take Lucien, we will all set out together — Will you go?"

"Certainly, my wish is yours," he replied with a smile.

Jeanne, stooping her head, wiped away big scalding tears of anger and grief.

Then she leaned back in her chair, as if she desired to hear and see nothing more, whilst Madame Deberle, delighted at the unexpected

pleasure held out to her, broke forth in boisterous comment.

Oh! how kind her husband was!

She kissed him for the trouble he would be put to.

Then she plunged into the details of preparation.

They would leave the following week. Heavens! she would never have time to get everything ready!

Then she wanted to sketch an itinerary; it was necessary to take such a route; they would stay a week at Rome, they would stop in a charming little spot of which Madame de Guiraud had spoken to her; and finally she wrangled with Pauline, who wished them to delay the journey, so that she could accompany them with her husband.

"Ah! no, indeed!" she said. "The marriage can take place after we return."

They had forgotten Jeanne. She was closely watching her mother and the doctor.

Certainly, Hélène now favored that journey, as it was to bring her close to Henri. It was a

great delight: to go away together to the land of the sun, to pass the time side by side, to take advantage of the hours of freedom. Her appeased anxiety was shown by the smile that played on her lips, she had been in dread of losing him, now she was so happy at the prospect of having with her all her loves! And, while Juliette was explaining all the localities through which they would travel, Hélène and Henri imagined themselves wandering in the glory of an ideal spring-time, and by their glances promised that they would enjoy their love there, and not there only, but wherever they might be together.

Meantime, a feeling of gloom had gradually settled on Monsieur Rambaud and he had grown silent, but not without noticing Jeanne's discomfort.

"Are you not well, my darling?" he asked in an undertone.

"Oh! no, I am very ill — Carry me up again, I entreat you."

"But we must let your mother know."

"No, no, mamma is busy, she has no time — Carry me up, carry me up again."

He took her in his arms, telling Hélène that the child was a little fatigued. She begged him to wait for her upstairs, she would follow them.

The little one, light as she was, slipped from his hands, and he was obliged to stop on the second landing.

She had leaned her head on his shoulder, and they looked at each other with an expression of much grief.

Not a sound broke the chilling silence of the stairway.

Then he whispered:

"You are pleased at the idea of going to Italy, aren't you?"

But she burst into sobs, stammering that she no longer wanted it, preferring to die in her own room. Oh! she would not go, she would fall sick, she plainly felt that. Nowhere would she go, nowhere! They could give her little shoes to the poor.

Then, in the midst of her weeping, she whispered:

"You remember what you asked me one evening?"

"What, my pet?"

"Why, to remain always with mamma, always, always — Well! if you still wish it, I wish it also."

Monsieur Rambaud's eyes were filled with tears. He kissed her tenderly, whilst she added in a still lower whisper:

"You are perhaps angry because I worked myself into a frenzy. I did not know, you see — But it is you whom I want. Oh! at once, will you not? At once — I love you better than the other —"

Below, in the pavilion, Hélène was again lapsing into forgetfulness. They were still talking about the journey. She felt an uncontrollable longing to open her bursting heart, to tell Henri of all the happiness that was choking her.

So, while Juliette and Pauline were discussing the number of dresses to be taken, she leaned towards him and made the appointment that she had refused but an hour before.

"Come to-night, I shall expect you."

When she at length went up to her apartments, she met Rosalie on the way, rushing downstairs in wild excitement.

As soon as she saw her mistress, the housemaid exclaimed:

"Madame! madame! make haste! —— Mademoiselle is not well. She is spitting blood."

III

On leaving the table, the doctor spoke to his wife of a lady in confinement, with whom he would no doubt be compelled to spend the night. He set out at nine o'clock, went down to the water's edge, and walked along the deserted quays, in the dark night; a light, moist breeze was blowing, the swollen Seine was rolling in inky waves. When eleven o'clock struck, he reascended the slopes of the Trocadéro and came to ramble around the house, whose large square mass appeared to stand out in denser gloom. But light still shone through the dining-room windows. Walking around the house, he saw that the kitchen window was also brilliantly lighted. Then he stopped in astonishment, gradually increasing to uneasiness. Moving shadows were seen on the curtains, and there seemed to be a considerable stir within. Perhaps

Monsieur Rambaud had remained for dinner? Never, however, did the good man forget himself so far as to stay beyond ten o'clock. And he dared not go up; what would he say if Rosalie should open the door to him? At last, about midnight, mad with impatience, neglecting all precautions, he rang, and passed in front of Madame Bergeret's lodge without responding to her inquiry. Upstairs Rosalie received him.

"It is you, monsieur. Come in. I am going to say that you have arrived — Madame must be waiting for you."

She showed no surprise at seeing him at that hour. Whilst he was entering the dining-room, not knowing what to say, she continued, excitedly:

"Oh! mademoiselle is very ill, monsieur — What a night! I am almost run off my legs."

She left him. The doctor had sat down mechanically. He was forgetting that he was a physician. Along the quay, he had thought of that room into which Hélène was about to introduce him, while laying a finger on her lips so as not to wake up

Jeanne, lying in the adjoining alcove; the night-lamp would be burning, the room would be bathed in shadow, their kisses would not be heard. And he was there, as on a visit, with his hat in hand, waiting. Behind the door, an obstinate cough was the only sound that disturbed the profound silence.

Rosalie reappeared, rapidly crossed the dining-room, a basin in her hand, merely remarking to him :

“Madame desires that you do not go in.”

He remained seated, unable to leave. Then the meeting would be for another day? That stupefied him, as an impossible thing. Then he reflected; this poor Jeanne was in very bad health; children only caused sorrow and vexations. But the door was opened again, Doctor Bodin appeared, making a thousand apologies. For a moment, he strung out his phrases: some one had come to ask for him, he would always be most happy to consult his illustrious confrère.

“Undoubtedly, undoubtedly,” repeated Doctor Deberle, whose ears were buzzing.

The old physician, quieted, affected to be perplexed and to hesitate about the diagnosis. Lowering his voice, he discussed the symptoms in technical parlance, interrupting his remarks frequently and concluding by a knowing wink. There was a dry cough, very great prostration, a high fever. Perhaps it was a case of typhoid fever. Yet he did not commit himself, the chloro-anæmic disease, for which they had treated the patient so long, made him dread unforeseen complications.

"What do you think of it?" he asked after each phrase.

Doctor Deberle replied with evasive gestures. Whilst his confrère was speaking, he grew gradually ashamed of being there. Why had he come up?

"I applied two blisters to her," continued the old physician. "I am waiting, what do you think? — But you are going to see her. You will then give me your opinion."

And he led him into the room. Henri entered, shuddering. The room was very dimly lighted with a lamp. He recalled other such nights, the

same warm odor, the same stifling and still air, the same depth of shadow enveloping the furniture and the hangings. But no one came to meet him with outstretched hands, as of old. Monsieur Rambaud, overwhelmed, sat in an arm-chair, and seemed to be asleep. Hélène, standing in front of the bed, in a white dressing-gown, did not turn around; and her pale figure seemed to him very tall. Then, for a minute, he examined Jeanne. Her weakness was now so great that it fatigued her even to open her eyes. Bathed in perspiration, she remained in a state of drowsiness, with wan face save for a burning blush on her cheeks.

"It is an acute phthisis," he murmured at last, speaking quite loud without wishing to, and showing no surprise, as if he had foreseen the case for a long time.

Hélène heard it and looked at him. She was quite cold, her eyes were dry, and she remained terribly calm.

"You think so?" merely said Doctor Bodin, nodding his head, with the approving air of a man who did not wish to be the first to give his opinion.

He sounded the child again. Jeanne, her members inert, lent herself to the examination, without seeming to understand why they were tormenting her. There were a few hurried words exchanged between the two doctors. The old doctor mentioned amphoric respiration and spoke of the sound of a cracked pot; however, he feigned still to hesitate, he was speaking now of a capillary bronchitis. Doctor Deberle explained that an accidental cause must have determined the malady, no doubt a chill, but that he had several times already noticed chloro-anæmia favoring chest affections. Hélène, standing behind them, was waiting.

"Listen yourself," said Doctor Bodin, making way for Henri.

The latter leaned over, wishing to take hold of Jeanne. She had not raised her eyelids, but yielded, lying there burning with fever. Her open chemise showed a child's breast on which the nascent forms of the woman were scarcely marked; and nothing was more chaste or more heart-rending than that puberty already touched by death. She did not resist the old doctor's touch. But, as soon as

Henri's fingers brushed against her, she received, as it were, a shock. Her startled modesty awakened her from the stupor into which she was plunged. She started like a young woman surprised and violated, she clasped both her poor little thin arms on her breast, while stammering in a shuddering voice :

"Mamma —, mamma —"

Then she opened her eyes. When she recognized who was there, she was filled with terror. She saw herself naked, and sobbing from shame, she quickly drew the bed-clothes over her. It seemed that in her agony, she had suddenly grown ten years older, and that, with death hovering over her, her twelve years were ripe enough to understand that that man must not touch her and find her mother again in her. She cried out anew, calling for help :

"Mamma —, mamma —, I beg you —"

Hélène, who had not yet spoken, came quite close to Henri. She was looking at him fixedly, with her face like marble. When she touched him, she uttered the single word in a smothered voice :

"Go!"

Doctor Bodin tried to calm Jeanne, whom a coughing attack now shook in her bed. He swore to her that no one should oppose her, that everybody was going to leave, so as to let her be quiet.

"Go," H  l  ne repeated in her low and deep voice, in her lover's ear. "It must be clear to you that we have killed her."

Then, unable to utter a word, Henri left. He lingered for a moment in the dining-room, waiting for he knew not what, something that perhaps would happen. Then, seeing that Doctor Bodin was not going out, he left, he groped down the stairway, without Rosalie's even taking care to light his way. He was thinking of the astounding progress of cases of acute phthisis, an ailment that he had closely studied: the miliary tubercles would be rapidly multiplied, choking sensations would increase, Jeanne would certainly not last three weeks.

A week elapsed. The sun rose and set on Paris, in the great broadened sky opposite her window, without H  l  ne having a clear perception of the

pitiless and rhythmic time. She knew that her daughter was doomed, she lived as if stunned, filled with the dread of her heart-rending sorrow. She waited hopelessly with the conviction that death would not spare its victim. She could not weep, but gently paced the room, always standing, and caring for the patient with slow and precise movements. Sometimes when overcome by fatigue, she would fall on a chair, and watch her for hours. Jeanne became weaker and weaker; very painful vomitings were exhausting her, the fever never ceased. When Doctor Bodin came, he examined her for an instant, and left a prescription; but his bent form, as he retired, expressed such powerlessness that the mother did not even accompany him to question him.

On the day following the crisis, the Abbé Jouve lost no time in calling. He and his brother arrived each evening, shook hands silently with Hélène, not daring to ask her for news. They had offered to sit up, watching in turn, but she dismissed them about ten o'clock, she wanted no one in the room during the night. One evening, the Abbé, who

seemed very much concerned since the day before, took her aside.

"I have thought of one thing," he murmured. "The dear child has been prevented by her health —— She might take her first communion here ——"

Hélène did not seem at first to understand. This idea which, in spite of his tolerant views, showed the priest in all his entirety, with his anxiety for spiritual affairs, surprised Hélène and even wounded her a little. With a gesture of indifference, she said:

"No, no, I do not want any one to torment her —— Well, if there is a paradise, she will enter it at once."

But, that very evening, Jeanne experienced one of those delusive improvements that deceive the dying. With an invalid's keen sense of hearing, she had heard the Abbé.

"It is you, my kind friend," she said. "You are speaking of the communion —— It will be soon, will it not?"

"Undoubtedly, my darling," he replied.

Then she wished him to come near and talk to her. Her mother had raised her on the pillow, and sitting there, she appeared very small; there was a smile on her burning lips, whilst death was already visible in her brilliant eyes.

"Oh! I am doing very well," she continued, "I could get up, if I wished to. Tell me! Should I have a white dress and a bouquet? — Will the church be as beautiful as for the month of Mary?"

"More beautiful, my pet."

"True? there will be as many flowers, they will sing things as sweet? — Soon, soon, you promise me?"

A flood of joyful thoughts filled her mind. She was looking in front of her at the bed-curtains, and said ecstatically that she loved the good God well, and that she had seen Him, when they were singing canticles. She heard organs, she saw the lights turning, whilst the flowers in the large vases fluttered like butterflies. But a violent cough shook her, and threw her back in the bed. She continued to smile, she did not seem to know that she was coughing, repeating:

"I am going to get up to-morrow, I will learn my catechism without a mistake, we will all be very happy."

At the foot of the bed Hélène was sobbing. She, who could not weep, felt a flood of tears welling up from her heart, as she heard Jeanne's laugh. She was choking, she fled into the dining-room to conceal her despair. The Abbé had at once followed her. Monsieur Rambaud had arisen hurriedly, in order to entertain the little one.

"See! mamma was crying, has she hurt herself?" she asked.

"Your mamma?" he replied. "She did not cry, on the contrary, she laughed because you are feeling so well."

In the dining-room, Hélène, whose head was resting on the table, stifled her sobs between her clasped hands. The Abbé leaned over, entreating her to control herself. But, raising her tear-stained face, she reproached herself, she told him that she had killed her daughter; and a full confession escaped from her lips in broken sentences. Never would she have yielded to that man, if Jeanne

had remained near her. She had been obliged to meet him in that unknown room. *Mon Dieu!* Heaven should have taken her with her child. She could no longer live. The terrified priest calmed her with the promise of pardon.

There was a ring, a sound of voices came from the anteroom. Hélène wiped her eyes as Rosalie entered.

"Madame, it is Doctor Deberle ——"

"I do not wish him to come in."

"He is asking about mademoiselle."

"Tell him that she is dying."

The door had remained open, Henri had heard all. Then, without waiting for the servant, he went down again. Each day he went up, received the same answer and went away.

Visitors were overwhelming Hélène. The few ladies whose acquaintance she had made at the Deberles', thought it their duty to offer her their sympathy. Madame de Chermette, Madame Levasseur, Madame de Guiraud, and others besides, presented themselves; they did not ask to go in, but they questioned Rosalie in such a loud

tone that the sound of their voices was audible through the thin partitions of the little apartment. Hélène impatiently received them in the dining-room and stood while addressing only a few remarks to them. She remained all day in her dressing-gown, neglecting to change her linen, having her fine hair merely twisted and fastened up. Her eyes were closed from fatigue, her face was flushed, her mouth was bitter and clammy and she could hardly speak. When Juliette went up, she could not exclude her, but allowed her to remain for an instant near the bed.

"My dear," said the latter to her amicably one day, "you are giving way too much. Take courage."

And Hélène had to answer Juliette, when the latter sought to distract her, by speaking of the topics that interested Paris.

"You know that we are certainly going to have war — I am very anxious, I have two cousins who will go to the front."

It was her habit to call thus on returning from her rounds about Paris, excited by all the gossip she had heard during the afternoon, and disturbing

the calm of this sick-room by the rustle of her long skirts; it was in vain that she lowered her voice and assumed pitying airs, her agreeable indifference penetrated through her considerate manner, and expressed her happiness and glory in her own good health. H  l  ne, downcast in her presence, suffered with a jealous anguish.

"Madame," Jeanne murmured one evening, "why does not Lucien come here to play?"

Juliette, for a moment embarrassed, was satisfied with smiling.

"Is he also ill?" continued the little one.

"No, my darling, he is not ill — He is at college."

And as H  l  ne accompanied her into the ante-room, she desired to explain her falsehood.

"Oh! I would really bring him, I know that it is not contagious — But children soon get frightened, and Lucien is so stupid! He would be capable of weeping on seeing your poor angel —"

"Yes, yes, you are right," H  l  ne interrupted, her heart rent at the thought of that woman's gaiety, whose child was at home in good health.

A second week had passed. The malady followed its course and at each hour carried off a little of Jeanne's life. It approached with measured but fearful rapidity, carrying on through all the expected phases, the destruction of that tender and lovable flesh, and without sparing her a single one of them. The spitting of blood had ceased; at times the cough vanished. The child was almost stifled with a feeling of oppression and by the difficulty of her breathing one could follow the ravages of the disease in her little breast. Such weakness as hers could not endure so severe an attack, and tears moistened the eyes of the Abbé and of Monsieur Rambaud as they heard her. For days and nights, her breathing was heard from under the curtains, the poor creature whom it seemed that a mere shock ought to kill, was not yet to die notwithstanding that her agony bathed her in sweat. Her mother, at the end of her strength, could no longer endure the sound of that rattling, and went into the adjoining room to rest her head against a wall.

Gradually, Jeanne became isolated. She no longer saw people, her face was clouded and vacant, as if she had already lived all alone, somewhere else. When those around her wished to attract her attention and gave their names for her to recognize them, she looked at them fixedly, without a smile, then turned again towards the wall with a look of fatigue. A shadow was enveloping her, she was passing away in that state of sulky irritation which marked the days of her jealous fits. Yet a sick person's caprices often aroused her.

One morning, she asked her mother :

"It is Sunday, to-day?"

"No, my child," H  l  ne answered. "We are only at Friday — Why do you want to know?"

She seemed already to have forgotten the question that she had put. But the second day after, as Rosalie was in the room, she said to her in a whisper :

"It is Sunday — Z  phyrin is here, ask him to come to me."

The girl hesitated; but H  l  ne, who had heard, signified her consent by a sign. The child repeated :

“Bring him, come both of you, I shall be pleased.”

When Rosalie entered with Z  phyrin, Jeanne arose on the pillow. The little soldier, with bare head, his hands spread out, waddled about to conceal his painful emotion. He loved mademoiselle very much, he was seriously worried to see her “shoulder arms to the left,” as he called it in the kitchen. And so, in spite of Rosalie’s warnings, for she recommended him to be cheerful, he preserved a dazed manner, with downcast looks, on seeing her so pale, and reduced to almost nothing at all. He had retained his sensitive nature, despite all his triumphant airs. He could not utter one of those fine phrases, in the expression of which he was now so proficient. The housemaid, from behind, pinched him to make him laugh. But he could only stammer :

“I beg your pardon, mademoiselle and the company ——”

Jeanne lifted herself on her emaciated arms. She opened her large vacant eyes, she seemed to be looking for some one. Her head was shaking, doubtless the brilliant light dazzled her, surrounded as she already was by the shadows of death.

"Come near, my friend," said Hélène to the soldier. "It is mademoiselle who asked to see you."

The sunlight entered through the window, in a broad yellow ray in which danced the dust from the carpet. March had come, and without the buds of spring were visible. Zéphyrin stepped forward into the sunlight; his little round face, covered with freckles, shone with the golden tint of ripe wheat, whilst the buttons on his tunic sparkled, and his red trousers blazed like a field of corn-poppies.

Jeanne now perceived him. But her eyes grew restless again, and her uncertain look wandered from corner to corner.

"What do you want, my child?" her mother asked. "We are all here."

Then she realized what the child needed.

"Rosalie, come here — Mademoiselle wishes to see you."

Rosalie then moved into the sunlight. The strings of her cap, thrown back over her shoulders, flapped like butterflies' wings. A golden dust was falling on her coarse black hair and on her good-natured, flat-nosed, thick-lipped face. For Jeanne there were only two persons in the room, the little soldier and the cook, who were standing close together within the line of light and Jeanne was looking at them.

"Well, my darling," Hélène continued, "why don't you speak to them? — Here they are together."

Jeanne looked at them, and her head trembled slightly, like that of a very old woman. They were there like husband and wife, ready to take each other arm in arm, to return to the country. The mild air of spring warmed them, and, desirous of cheering mademoiselle, they ended by smiling at each other with a stupid but tender expression. The odor of health seemed to escape from their full, healthy bodies. If they had been alone,

Zéphyrin would certainly have taken hold of Rosalie and would have received in return a hearty slap. That was evident in their expression.

"Well, my darling, have you nothing to say to them?"

Jeanne looked at them, her choking sensations increasing. She did not say a word. Suddenly, she burst into tears. Zéphyrin and Rosalie had to leave the room immediately.

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle and the company ——," said the little soldier once more, as he went away in confusion.

This was one of Jeanne's last caprices. She sunk into a melancholy mood, from which nothing could draw her. She isolated herself from every one, even from her mother. When the latter leaned over her bed, to catch her glance, the child's face was unmoved, as if only the shadow of the curtains had passed over her eyes. She had intervals of silence, the dark resignation of one whose life is despaired of and who feels herself dying. Sometimes she remained a long time with her eyelids

half-closed, without her pinched look revealing what stubborn idea was absorbing her. Nothing now existed for her but her large doll which was lying by her side. They had given it to her one night to divert her from her intolerable sufferings; and she refused to give it back, she defended it with fierce gestures when they wanted to take it away from her. The doll, its pasteboard head resting on the bolster, was stretched out like a sick person, its shoulders covered by the bed-clothes. Doubtless she was nursing it, for from time to time she stretched out her burning hands, and felt its pink leather limbs, all disjointed and empty of bran. For hours, her eyes did not leave its ever-fixed enamel eyes, and its white teeth with their perpetual smile. Then she would yield to tender emotions, feeling the need of clasping it to her breast and of resting her cheek against the little wig, whose caressing contact seemed to comfort her. She thus took refuge in the love of her big doll, assuring herself each time she awoke from her slumber, that it was still there, seeing only it, talking with it, having sometimes on her countenance

the trace of a smile, as if the doll had murmured things in her ear.

The third week was drawing to a close. One morning the old doctor remained for some time. Hélène understood that her child would not live through the day. Since the evening before, she had been in a stupor that even deprived her of the consciousness of her acts. They struggled no longer against death, they counted the hours. As the patient was suffering from a burning thirst, the doctor had merely recommended that they should give her an opiate beverage, to ease her in her last moments; and that final abandonment of remedies, plunged Hélène into a state of imbecility. As long as the draughts lay around on the night-table, she still hoped for her recovery by some miracle. Now the vials and the boxes were no longer there, her last hope departed. Her only instinct was to be near Jeanne, not to leave her, to look at her. The doctor, who wanted to draw her away from that terrible scene, tried to remove her by entrusting her with small cares. But she was drawn by a physical yearning to see her and returned to her

side. Quite erect, her arms hanging beside her, and her face swollen with despair, she waited.

About one o'clock, the Abbé Jouve and Monsieur Rambaud arrived. The physician went to meet them, and whispered a few words to them. Both grew pale. They remained stock-still; and their hands trembled. Hélène had not turned round.

The day was superb, one of those sunshiny afternoons of the early days of April. Jeanne was tossing restlessly in her bed. At times her lips moved painfully from the thirst that consumed her. From under the covering she had taken her poor transparent hands, and she was moving them gently to and fro. The silent work of the disease was over, she coughed no more and her failing voice sounded like a mere breathing. For a moment she turned her head, looking toward the light. Doctor Bodin opened the window quite wide.

Jeanne now became tranquil, with her cheek resting on the pillow, looking out over Paris, while her oppressed breathing grew slower and slower.

During those three weeks of suffering, many times had she thus turned towards the city spread

out towards the horizon. Her face became grave, she was dreaming. At that last hour, Paris was smiling under the fair April sun. From without, warm breezes entered, and the sound of children's laughter and sparrows' twitterings. The dying girl exerted her utmost strength to look again, to follow the floating smoke-wreaths that mounted from the far-off faubourgs. She found again her three acquaintances, the Invalides, the Panthéon, the Saint-Jacques tower; then, the unknown began, her weary eyelids became half-closed, in front of the immense sea of roofs. Perhaps she was dreaming that she was gradually getting very light, that she was flying like a bird. At last, then, she was going to know, she would place herself on the domes and on the spires, a few strokes of her wings and she would see the forbidden things that were hidden from children. But she experienced a new attack of restlessness, her hands were still groping about; and she became calm only when she held her large doll in her little arms, against her breast. She wished to take it away with her. Her look was lost in the distance,

among the chimneys that gleamed in the ruddy sunlight.

Four o'clock had just struck, the evening was already casting its blue shadows. The end had come, there was a choking, a death-struggle, slow and without shock. The dear angel had no longer the strength to resist. Monsieur Rambaud, overwhelmed, fell on his knees, trembled with silent sobs, and dragged himself behind a curtain to conceal his grief. The Abbé was kneeling at the bedside, his hands clasped, stammering the prayers for the dying.

"Jeanne, Jeanne," murmured Hélène, chilled with a horror that sent its icy breath through her hair.

She had pushed the doctor aside, she threw herself on the floor, and leaned against the bed to watch her daughter's face. Jeanne opened her eyes, but she did not look at her mother. Her glances always wandered down there, on Paris that was fading from her view. She drew her doll to her still closer, her last love. Her bosom heaved a deep sigh, followed by two lighter ones. Her

eyes grew dim, her countenance expressed bitter anguish.

Relief soon came, she breathed no longer, her mouth remained open.

"It is over," said the doctor as he took hold of her hand.

Jeanne was looking at Paris with her large vacant eyes. Her long, gentle countenance appeared still longer, with its stern features, while a gray shadow descended from her contracted brow; and her wan face retained in death its peculiar expression of a jealous woman. The doll, its head thrown back, its locks drooping, seemed dead like her.

"It is over," repeated the doctor, who let the cold little hand fall again.

Hélène, with a strained expression on her face, clasped her brow between her hands, as if she felt her head splitting. She did not weep, but gazed in front of her like a maniac. A sob rattled in her throat; she had just observed, at the foot of the bed, a small pair of shoes, forgotten there. It was over, Jeanne would never again put them on, they might give the little shoes to the poor. And her

tears flowed, she remained on the floor, pressing her face upon the dead child's hand, which had slipped down. Monsieur Rambaud sobbed. The Abbé had raised his voice, whilst Rosalie, standing in the half-open door of the dining-room, was biting her handkerchief, so as to check the sound of her grief.

Just at that minute, Doctor Deberle rang. He could not refrain from going up to enquire.

"How is she doing?" he asked.

"Ah! monsieur," Rosalie stammered, "she is dead."

He stood motionless, stunned at the news of that ending which he was expecting from day to day. Then he murmured:

"*Mon Dieu!* the poor child! what a misfortune!"

And he could only utter this ordinary but heart-rending phrase. The door had been shut again, and he went away.

IV

When Madame Deberle learned of Jeanne's death, she wept, she had one of those emotional outbreaks that rendered her beside herself for forty-eight hours. It was a noisy despair, beyond all bounds. She went up and threw herself into Hélène's arms. Then, spurred by a remark that had been spoken in her hearing, the idea of giving the little corpse a touching funeral took possession of her and wholly occupied her. She offered her services, she took charge of the slightest details. The mother, exhausted from weeping, remained on a chair, entirely overwhelmed. Monsieur Rambaud, who was acting in her name, lost his head. He consented with profusely expressed gratitude. Hélène awoke for an instant to say that she desired flowers, an abundance of flowers.

Then, without losing a minute, Madame Deberle actively exerted herself. She spent the whole of the next day in running to and fro among the ladies of her acquaintance, to tell them the sad news. Her dream was to have a line of little girls in white dresses. She needed at least thirty of them, and she returned only when she had secured that number. She had gone herself to the funeral director's office, discussing the styles, choosing the draperies. They would have the garden gates draped, they would lay out the body in the midst of lilacs, which were already covered with fine green tips. It would be charming.

"Mon Dieu! if it will only be fine to-morrow!" was the remark that escaped her in the evening, after her commissions were finished.

The morning was radiant, a blue sky, a golden sun, with the pure and vivifying breath of spring. The funeral was to be at ten o'clock. At nine, the hangings were in place. Juliette came to give advice to the workmen. She desired that the trees should not be completely covered. The white draperies, with silver fringes, formed a porch

between the two sides of the gate, which was opened back against the lilacs. But she quickly returned to the salon, in order to receive those ladies. They assembled at her house, so as not to crowd Madame Grandjean's two rooms. But she was greatly annoyed, as her husband had had to go to Versailles in the morning: a consultation that could not be postponed, he said. She remained alone, she would never get through it.

Madame Berthier arrived first with her two daughters.

"Think of it," exclaimed Madame Deberle, "Henri has deserted me! — Well, Lucien, won't you say good-day?"

Lucien was there, dressed for the interment, with black gloves. He seemed surprised at the sight of Sophie and Blanche, dressed as if they were going to some procession. A silk ribbon fastened their muslin dresses, their veils, which fell to the ground, concealed their little tulle caps. Whilst the two mothers were chatting, the three children looked at each other, somewhat stiff in their toilets. Then Lucien said:

"Jeanne is dead."

His heart was heavy, but he smiled, nevertheless, a smile of surprise. Since the day before, the idea that Jeanne was dead had sobered him. As his mother did not answer him, too full of business as she was, he had questioned the servants. Then one could not move when one was dead?

"She is dead, she is dead," repeated the two sisters, rosy-faced under their white veils. "Are we going to see her?"

For a moment he reflected, his looks wandering, and his mouth open, as if looking to see what was over yonder, beyond what he knew. Then he said in a low voice:

"We shall not see her again."

Still other little girls entered. Lucien, at a sign from his mother, went to meet them. Marguerite Tissot, in her cloud of muslin, with her large eyes, seemed a child-Virgin; her blond hair escaped from under her little cap, and looked like a gold-embroidered hood under her snow-white veil. A subdued smile greeted the arrival of the five Levasseur girls; they were all alike, one would have said

they came from a boarding-school, the eldest leading the way, and the youngest bringing up the rear; and their spreading skirts taking up the whole corner of the room. But when little Guiraud appeared, the whispering voices grew louder; they laughed, they thronged round to inspect her and to kiss her. She looked like a white turtle-dove with its feathers ruffled, and no bigger than a bird, enveloped by the fluttering gauze that gave her a round and full appearance. Even her mother could not find her hands. The salon was gradually filled as with a fall of snow. Some boys, in their overcoats, formed black spots amid this white array. Lucien, since his little wife was dead, was looking for another. He hesitated a great deal, he would have liked a wife taller than himself, like Jeanne. However, he appeared to decide upon Marguerite, whose hair astonished him. He did not leave her.

"The body has not yet been brought down," Pauline had just whispered to Juliette.

Pauline was excited, as if it were a matter of preparing for a ball. Her sister had had a great

deal of trouble in preventing her from coming in white.

"What!" Juliette exclaimed, "what are they thinking of? — I will go up. Stay with these ladies."

She left the salon hurriedly, where the mothers in dark toilet were chatting in an undertone, whilst the children dared not make a movement, for fear of rumpling their costumes. When she entered the mortuary room, a great chill seized her. Jeanne was still lying on the bed, her hands clasped; and, like Marguerite, like the Levasseur girls, she had a white dress, a white cap and white shoes. A wreath of white roses, placed on her cap, made of her the queen of her little friends, fêted by all those people who were waiting downstairs. In front of the window, the oak coffin, lined with satin, rested on two chairs, and stood open like a jewel box. The furniture was orderly arranged, a taper was burning; the closed and darkened room had the damp odor and stillness of a cellar that has been walled up for a long time. Juliette, who came from the sunlight, from the smiling life of

the outside, remained mute, and stopped all of a sudden, not daring to say more than that they should make haste.

"A great many people have already arrived," she at last murmured. Then, having received no reply, she added, as if to say something more:

"Henri had to go to a consultation at Versailles ——; you will excuse him ——"

Hélène, seated in front of the bed, looked at her vacantly. She could not be drawn from that room. For thirty-six hours she had been there, despite the supplications of Monsieur Rambaud and the Abbé Jouve, who were watching with her. The endless agony of the last two nights had completely exhausted her. Then there had been the frightful grief of the last toilet, the white silk shoes which she had insisted on putting on the little corpse's feet herself. Overpowered, and as if benumbed by the excess of her grief, she did not move.

"You have flowers?" she stammered with an effort, her eyes still fixed on Madame Deberle.

"Yes, yes, my dear," the latter replied. "Do not trouble yourself."

Since her daughter had heaved her last sigh, that was her only concern: flowers, a wealth of flowers. On seeing each new person, she was uneasy, she seemed to fear that they would never find enough flowers.

"You have some roses?" she continued, after a silence.

"Yes — I can assure you that you will be quite satisfied."

She shook her head, and relapsed into immobility. Meantime, the undertaker's men were waiting on the landing. There could be no further delay. Monsieur Rambaud, who staggered like a drunken man, beseechingly entreated Juliette to aid him in taking the poor woman out of the room. Each gently supported one of her arms; they raised her up, they led her towards the dining-room. But when she understood, she repelled them, in a final outbreak of despair. It was a heart-rending scene. She had thrown herself on her knees in front of the bed, clinging to the sheets, and filling the room with the clamor of her resistance; whilst Jeanne, stretched there in the silence

of eternity, stiff and cold, presented a face of stone. It was slightly discolored now, her mouth had the pout of a vindictive child; and it was that gloomy and pitiless mask of a jealous girl that was maddening Hélène. During her thirty-six hours' watch, she had plainly seen the bitterness freezing on her daughter's features, growing fiercer in proportion as she drew nearer to the grave. How it would have comforted her, if Jeanne could only have smiled on her for a last time!

"No, no! ——," she exclaimed. "I entreat you, leave her for an instant —— You cannot take her from me! —— I want to embrace her —— Oh! for an instant, a single instant! ——"

And, with her trembling arms, she held her, objecting to her removal by those men who were concealed in the anteroom, their backs turned, and their faces expressing vexation. But her lips did not warm the cold face, she felt Jeanne was still obstinate and refused to yield. Then she gave herself up to the hands that were dragging her, and fell on a dining-room chair, with that dull plaint repeated twenty times:

“My God! —— My God! ——”

Emotion had exhausted Monsieur Rambaud and Madame Deberle. After a brief silence, when the latter half opened the door, all was over. There had been no sound, scarcely a rustle. The screws, oiled beforehand, shut the lid forever. The room was empty, a white cloth concealed the coffin.

The door remained open, they left Hélène free. When she returned, she looked distractedly at the furniture and the walls. They had just carried away the body. Rosalie had drawn up the bed-covering in order to efface even the slight impression left by the light weight of her who had gone. Opening her arms with a wild gesture, her hands extended, Hélène rushed hastily to the stairway. She would go down. Monsieur Rambaud held her back, whilst Madame Deberle explained to her that it was not customary. But she promised that she would be rational, she would not follow the burial party. They might surely allow her to see; she would remain quiet in the pavilion. Both wept as they listened to her. She must necessarily be dressed. Juliette concealed her house-dress under a black

shawl. But she could not find a bonnet; at last, she found one, from which she tore a bunch of red vervain. Monsieur Rambaud, who was the chief mourner, took Hélène's arm. When they were in the garden:

"Do not leave her," murmured Madame Deberle.
"I have a lot of things to attend to ——"

Thereupon she left them. Hélène walked with difficulty, looking for something in front of her, as it were. As she came into the broad daylight, she sighed. *Mon Dieu!* what a glorious morning! But her glance at once fell upon the gate, she had just perceived the little coffin under the white hangings. Monsieur Rambaud let her approach only two or three steps.

"Come, be brave," he said, although he himself trembled.

They looked on. The narrow coffin was bathed in a ray of sunshine. On a lace cushion, at the foot, was placed a silver crucifix. To the left, a sprinkler was steeped in a holy-water font. The tall candles were burning without a flame, merely dotting the sunlight with little dancing souls in flight. Under the draperies, branches of trees

formed a bower, with their violet-hued buds. It was a corner bright with the glory of spring, where there entered through an opening in the draperies the golden beams of the broad ray that was expanding the cut flowers with which the coffin was covered. There was a scattering of flowers, bunches of white roses in heaps, white camellias, white lilacs, white carnations, a snowy mass of petals; the bier was hidden under the bunches of white flowers that fell from the pall, and the ground was strewn with the fallen leaves of white periwinkles and white hyacinths. The few passers-by in the Rue Vineuse stopped, and smiled tenderly in front of that sunny garden where the little corpse slept under the flowers. A chant seemed to rise amid all that whiteness, in the bright light a dazzling purity shone, the sun made the hangings, the bouquets and the wreaths glow, imparting to them almost their natural quivering. Above the roses, hummed a bee on the wing.

“The flowers —, the flowers —,” murmured Hélène, who could only give utterance to this thought.

She pressed her handkerchief against her lips, her eyes were filled with tears. It seemed to her that Jeanne must be warm, and a tender emotion filled her heart and she was specially grateful to those who had just covered her child with all those flowers. She wished to go nearer, Monsieur Rambaud no longer attempted to restrain her. How charming it was under those hangings! A perfume arose, not a breath stirred the warm air. Then she stooped and chose one rose only. It was a rose that she came in search of, to slip into her bosom. But she began to tremble and Monsieur Rambaud became anxious.

"Do not stay here," he said, drawing her away. "You promised not to make yourself ill."

He was trying to lead her into the pavilion, when the door of the salon was thrown open. Pauline was the first to appear. She had taken charge of the arrangements of the funeral cortège. One by one the little girls came down. It seemed like a sudden, early blooming, a clump of hawthorns that had miraculously blossomed. In the sunshine, all the delicate tints of white gleamed on the

spreading dresses and seemed like the play of sunlight on the wings of swans. From an apple-tree the petals were falling in showers; gossamer threads were floating about, the dresses partook of the purity of the season. The number seemed endless, they were already surrounding the lawn, and still they came down the steps, airy, floating like down, suddenly blossoming in the open air.

When the garden seemed all white, a recollection flashed upon Hélène at the sight of that unrestrained group of little girls. She recalled the ball of another joyous season, with its merry happiness and the little dancing feet. Once more she saw Marguerite as a milkmaid, her milk-pail hanging to her girdle, Sophie as a soubrette, whirling on the arm of her sister Blanche, on whose Jester's costume the bells tinkled gaily. Then, there were the five Levasseur girls, Red Riding Hoods whose crimson satin hoods with their black velvet bands seemed to increase as they whirled hither and thither; whilst little Guiraud, with her Alsatian butterfly-bow in her hair, danced like a maniac, in front of a Harlequin twice as tall as she. To-day,

all were arrayed in white. Jeanne also was dressed in white, but resting on the white satin pillow, surrounded by flowers. The delicate Japanese girl, with her hair transfixed by long pins, her purple tunic embroidered with birds, was leaving them in a white dress.

"How they have grown!" H  l  ne murmured as she burst into tears.

All were there, her daughter only was missing. Monsieur Rambaud wished her to enter the pavilion; but she remained on the doorstep, desirous of seeing the procession start. Several ladies approached and bowed gravely. The children looked at her, with astonishment expressed in their blue eyes.

Pauline, meanwhile, moved around, giving orders. She was lowering her voice for the occasion; but at times she forgot herself.

"Come, be good — Look, little blockhead, you are already dirty — I'll come and fetch you, do not stir."

The hearse arrived, they could now start. Madame Deberle appeared and exclaimed:

"They have forgotten the bouquets! —— Pauline, quick with the bouquets!"

Then there was some little confusion.

A bouquet of white roses had been provided for each little girl.

It was necessary to distribute these roses; the delighted children held the large bunches in front of them, like candles.

Lucien, who did not leave Marguerite, inhaled their perfume with delight as she pushed her bouquet of flowers in his face.

All those little girls, with their hands full of flowers, looked radiant in the sunlight, but they suddenly became grave, as they saw the men placing the bier on the hearse.

"Is she in that? ——" asked Sophie, in a whisper.

Her sister Blanche nodded.

Then she said in her turn:

"For men, it is big like this."

She was speaking of the coffin, and she spread out her arms as far as she was able.

But little Marguerite smiled as, with her nose buried among the roses, she declared that they

tickled her. The others followed suit in order to find out if this were so.

Some one called them, they once more became sedate.

Outside, the cortège had already reached the street.

At the corner of the Rue Vineuse, a woman with uncovered head, her feet covered with old shoes, was weeping and wiping her cheeks with the corner of her apron.

Some persons had taken positions at the windows, exclamations of pity broke the silence of the street.

The hearse, hung with white draperies with silver fringes, rolled noiselessly on; only the regular steps of the two white horses, deadened by the beaten ground of the highway, could be heard.

That car carried, as it were, a harvest of flowers, of bouquets and of wreaths, the coffin could not be seen; behind the car, the ground was strewn with lilac branches, the slight jolting shook the heaped-up mass of flowers at every moment. At the four corners floated long ribbons of white watered-silk which were held by four little girls,

Sophie and Marguerite, one of the Levasseurs and little Guiraud, the last named so tiny, so unsteady, that her mother accompanied her. The others, in a close body, surrounded the hearse, bearing their bouquets of roses. They walked slowly, their veils fluttered, and amid all this muslin, the wheels rolled on, as if borne on a cloud from which smiled delicate heads of cherubs.

Then, behind, following Monsieur Rambaud, with pale and downcast countenance, came ladies, some little boys, Rosalie, Zéphyrin, and the Deberles' servants.

Five empty mourning carriages followed these.

In the street flooded with sunshine, white pigeons took wing, at the passing of that car, symbolical of springtime.

"*Mon Dieu !* how annoying !" Madame Deberle repeated, on seeing the cortège move. "If Henri had but put off that consultation ! I told him to do so."

She did not know what to do with Hélène, who had fallen prostrate on a seat in the pavilion. Henri would have remained with her. He would have

somewhat consoled her. It was very disagreeable that he was not there. Happily, Mademoiselle Aurélie was willing to offer her services; she did not like solemn affairs, she would occupy herself at the same time with the collation which the children must have on their return.

Madame Deberle hastened to join the escort, which was directing its course towards the church, through the Rue de Passy.

The garden was now deserted, save for a few workmen who were folding the hangings. Only the scattered leaves of a camellia were to be seen on the sand over which Jeanne had passed. And Hélène, suddenly plunged into that solitude and great silence, felt anew the anguish, the wrench of that eternal separation. Yet once more, only once more, to be near her! The fixed idea that Jeanne departed in anger, with her gloomy countenance expressive of bitterness, penetrated her heart like a red-hot iron. Then, fully aware that Mademoiselle Aurélie was guarding her, Hélène's whole mind sought a plan to escape from her and to hurry to the cemetery.

"Yes, it is a great loss," repeated the old maid, comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair. "As for me, I should have adored children, little girls especially. Well! when I think of it, I am satisfied with not being married. It saves one many pangs."

She believed that she was diverting Hélène's thoughts.

She spoke of one of her friends who had had six children; all were dead.

Another lady had been left alone with a grown-up son who beat her; this one should have died, his mother could have been consoled without difficulty.

Hélène seemed to be listening to her.

She was riveted to the spot, but trembled with impatience.

"Now you are calmer," Mademoiselle Aurélie said at last. "*Mon Dieu!* one must always come back to reason."

The dining-room door communicated with the Japanese pavilion.

The old maid arose, opened this door, and curiously inspected the room. The table was covered with plates of cake.

Hélène quickly fled through the garden.

The gate was open, the undertaker's workmen were carrying away their ladder.

To the left, the Rue Vineuse turns into the Rue des Reservoirs. There the Passy cemetery is situated. A colossal supporting wall runs along the Boulevard de la Muette, the cemetery is, as it were, an immense terrace dominating the heights, the Trocadéro, the avenues, the whole of Paris. In twenty steps, Hélène was in front of the yawning gate, unfolding before her the wilderness of white tombstones and black crosses. She entered. Two large lilacs were budding at the corners of the first walk. Few burials took place there, weeds were plentiful, some cypress-trees threw their dark shadows across the verdure. Hélène dashed straight ahead; a flock of sparrows took fright, a grave-digger raised his head, after having thrown his spadeful of earth at random. Undoubtedly the escort had not arrived, the cemetery seemed empty. She turned abruptly to the right, and went as far as the terrace parapet; and on turning round, she perceived, behind a clump of acacias, the little girls

in white, kneeling in front of a receiving-vault, into which they had just lowered Jeanne's body. The Abbé Jouve, with outstretched hand, was giving a last blessing. She heard only the dull sound of the vault stone falling back.

It was over.

Pauline, however, had noticed her and was pointing her out to Madame Deberle.

The latter became almost angry, murmuring:

"What! she has come! That is not customary, it is in very bad taste!"

She stepped forward and showed her by the expression of her face that she disapproved of her conduct. Other ladies approached in their turn, out of curiosity. Monsieur Rambaud had rejoined her, standing beside her without speaking. She leaned on one of the acacias, feeling faint, and wearied at the presence of all those people. Whilst she nodded her acknowledgment of the condolences expressed, she was choked by a single thought: she had arrived too late, she had heard the sound of the stone falling back. Her eyes were ever turning to the vault, the step of which a cemetery-keeper was sweeping.

"Pauline, watch over the children!" Madame Deberle said.

The little girls rose from their knees, looking like a flock of white sparrows. Some, too small, their knees hidden by their skirts, had sat down on the ground, and had to be lifted up. Whilst they were lowering Jeanne, the taller ones had stretched out their heads, to see to the bottom of the vault. It was very dark, and shuddering, they turned pale. Sophie, in a whisper, asserted that one remained there for years and years. "At night, too?" one of the Levasseur girls asked. "Certainly, at night too, always in fact." Oh! at night! Blanche would die at the thought. All were looking at one another, their eyes staring, as if they had just heard a story of robbers. But when they were standing, free to roam about the vault, they became rosy again; it was not true, people told tales to make one laugh. It was very pleasant, that garden was pretty, with its tall grasses; what fine fun at hide-and-seek one could have, behind all those stones! The little feet were already dancing, the white dresses fluttered like wings. Amid the silence

of the tombs, the warm flood of sunshine was brightening that child group. Lucien had at last slyly thrust his hand under Marguerite's veil ; he was touching her hair, he wanted to know if she put anything on it, because it was so yellow. The little girl bridled up. Then he said to her that they would get married. Marguerite would like this, but she was afraid that he might pull out her hair. He touched it again, he found it as smooth as letter-paper.

"Do not go so far away!" Pauline called.

"Well! we are going," said Madame Deberle. "We are doing nothing here, the children must be hungry."

The little girls, who had scattered about like a boarding-school at play, had to be got into line once more. They counted them, the little Guiraud girl was missing ; at last they saw her very far off, in a path, promenading gravely under her mother's parasol. Then the ladies directed their way towards the gate, pushing in front of them the wave of white dresses. Madame Berthier congratulated Pauline on her marriage, which was to take place during the following month. Madame

Deberle said that she was starting in three days for Naples, with her husband and Lucien. The people disappeared, Zéphyrin and Rosalie remained last. In their turn, they moved away. They took each other's arm, delighted with that walk, in spite of their great grief; they slackened their pace, and for a moment longer, their lovers' forms could be seen dancing in the sunlight, at the end of the avenue.

"Come," murmured Monsieur Rambaud.

But Hélène, with a gesture, entreated him to wait. She remained alone, it seemed to her that a page from the book of her life had been torn away. When she had seen the last persons disappear, she knelt painfully in front of the vault. The Abbé Jouve, in his surplice, had not yet arisen.

Both prayed for a long time.

Then, without speaking, but with a look full of charity and pardon, the priest assisted her to rise.

"Give her your arm," he merely said to Monsieur Rambaud.

On the horizon, Paris bloomed in the radiance of that spring morning. In the cemetery, a greenfinch was singing.

V

Two years had rolled by. One December morning, the little cemetery slumbered in the intense cold. It had been snowing since the evening before, a fine snow that was driven by the north wind. From the whitening sky the flakes were falling at greater intervals with the floating lightness of feathers. The snow had already hardened, the parapet of the terrace was covered as with a thick trimming of swansdown. Beyond that white line, against the pale fog of the horizon, Paris stretched out.

On the snow, before Jeanne's tomb, Madame Rambaud was again kneeling in prayer. Her husband had just risen without having uttered a word. They had been married in November, at Marseilles. Monsieur Rambaud had sold his house in the "Halles," and had been in Paris for three

days to close up this matter; and the carriage that was waiting for them in the Rue des Reservoirs, was to take them back to the hotel for their trunks and then convey them to the railroad station. Hélène had made the journey with the single thought of kneeling there. She remained motionless, her head bowed, as if lost in thought and not feeling the cold earth that chilled her knees.

Meantime, the wind subsided. Monsieur Rambaud had stepped onto the terrace, so as to leave her to the mute sorrow awakened by her memory. A mist was rising from the suburbs of Paris, whose immensity was lost in this vague, pale fog. At the foot of the Trocadéro, the lead-colored city lay as if dead, covered by the last slowly-falling snowflakes. The now still air was spotted with pale specks that swayed to and fro with a slow, ceaseless movement against the dark background. Beyond the chimneys of the Manutention, whose brick towers assumed the tint of old copper, the unending white files grew denser, and they looked like the tatters of floating gauze, torn apart thread by thread. Not a breath stirred that dream-like shower

that, lulled in the air, fell sleepily to earth. As the flakes neared the roofs, they appeared to slacken their flight; one on another they fell incessantly, in myriads, and so silently that flowers in shedding their petals create more noise; forgetfulness of earth and of life, a sovereign peace sprang from that moving multitude in noiseless march through space. Now, everywhere, the sky grew brighter at the same moment, a milky hue spread over it, tinged by ascending smoke-wreaths. Gradually the houses stood out like brilliant islets and a bird's-eye view of the city showed its intersecting streets and squares, whose hollows and shadowy depths outlined the giant skeleton of the quarters.

Hélène had slowly risen. On the ground, the imprint of her knees remained in the snow. Wrapped in a large, dark cloak, trimmed with fur, amid that surrounding whiteness, she seemed very tall, and her shoulders looked magnificent. The trimming of her bonnet, a twist of black velvet, cast the shadow of a diadem on her forehead. She had recovered her beautiful, tranquil expression, her gray eyes and her white teeth, and her round,

somewhat strong chin which gave her an appearance of good sense and firmness. When she turned her head, her profile once more assumed the grave purity of a statue. Her blood coursed calmly beneath the undisturbed paleness of her cheeks, her whole appearance indicated that her life was under the dominance of chastity. Two tears had rolled from her eyelids, her peace was born of her old sorrow. And she stood there before the tombstone, a simple column, on which Jeanne's name was followed by two dates, measuring the brief existence of the little one dying at the age of twelve.

Around her the cemetery spread out its white sheet, pierced by the corners of rusty tombs, and iron crosses like arms crossed in sorrow. The only pathway in that deserted corner had been made by the footsteps of Hélène and Monsieur Rambaud. It was a spotless solitude in which the dead were sleeping. The light phantom-like shadows of the trees fell on the paths. From time to time, the snow fell noiselessly from a too heavily burdened branch; all else was motionless. At the

other end, a dark mass had tramped by: some one was being buried beneath that white shroud. A second procession entered on the left. The coffins and the followers filed by silently, like shadows outlined on a white sheet.

Hélène was awaking from her dream, when she noticed near her a beggar dragging herself along. It was mother Fétu, the noise of whose heavy men's shoes, cracked and mended with pack-thread, was deadened by the snow. Never had she seen her shiver under such gloomy distress, covered with dirtier tatters, and though still fat, she had a stupid aspect. In wretched weather, hard frosts or torrents of rain, the old woman now followed the funeral escorts to speculate on the pity of charitable people; and she knew that in the cemetery the fear of death made people liberal with their sous; she visited the various graves, and approached people at the moment when they were overcome by tears, because then they could not refuse to give her alms. Having entered with the last cortège, for a moment she had watched Hélène from a distance, but she had not recognized the

kind-hearted lady, and, between her sobs, she now related, with her hands outstretched, that she had at home two children who were dying of hunger. Hélène listened to her, mute in the presence of that apparition. The children were without fire, the elder was in the last stages of consumption. All of a sudden, old dame Fétu stopped; the twitching of her much-wrinkled face showed the working of her mind, and her tiny eyes sparkled. What! it was the good lady! Heaven then had heard her prayers! And, without disposing of the history of her children, she ran on in a whining tone, with an inexhaustible flood of words. She had lost some of her teeth, so that it was with difficulty that she could be understood. The good God poured out all His afflictions on her head. Her gentleman had dispensed with her, she had been confined to her bed for three months and had only just left it; yes, it was still sticking to her, now the pain affected her everywhere, one of her neighbors had told her that a spider must certainly have entered through her mouth, whilst she was asleep. If she had only had a little fire, she would have warmed





her stomach; that was the only thing that would comfort her now. But with nothing, nothing could be had, not even matches. Perhaps, though, the lady had been on a journey? That was her affair. Anyhow, she found her in fine health, and fresh, and beautiful. God would repay her for all that she had done. As H  l  ne was drawing out her purse, old mother F  tu puffed and blowed, leaning on the railing of Jeanne's tomb.

The funeral escorts had left. Somewhere, from a neighboring grave regular strokes of a pickaxe were audible, but the grave-digger could not be seen. The old woman, however, had regained breath, and closely watched the purse. Then, so as to increase the alms, she became very coaxing, and spoke of the other lady. One could not say that she was a charitable lady; well! she did not act wisely, her money did not do much good. She was shrewdly looking at H  l  ne while making these remarks. Then, she ventured to speak of the doctor. Oh! he was kind, very kind. Last summer, he had again traveled with his wife. Their little boy was growing, a fine child. But H  l  ne's

fingers trembled as she opened her purse, and old dame Fétu suddenly changed her tone. Bewildered and frightened, she had only just discovered that the good lady was there beside her daughter's tomb. She stammered, sighed, tried to force her tears. A darling so pretty, with such loves of little hands, which she still saw handing her white coins. And what long hair she had, with what large tear-filled eyes she looked at the poor! Ah! one could not replace such an angel; there were no more of them, one might search all Passy. On fine days, she would each Sunday bring a bouquet of Easter daisies, gathered in the trench of the fortifications. She was silent, uneasy at the gesture with which Hélène stopped her remarks. Was it then because she could no longer find something proper to say? The good lady was not weeping, and she gave her only a twenty-sou piece.

Monsieur Rambaud, meanwhile, had got close to the parapet of the terrace. Hélène went to join him. The old dame's eyes brightened at the sight of the gentleman. She did not know him; he must be a new-comer. Dragging her feet, she

followed H  l  ne, calling down on her all the blessings of Paradise ; and when she was near Monsieur Rambaud, she again spoke of the doctor. He would certainly have a fine burial when he died, if the poor people whom he had attended for nothing followed his body ! He was somewhat of a rover, it could not be denied. He was well known to some ladies in Passy, but for all that, he adored his wife, such a pretty lady, who had opportunities to misconduct herself, but who did not even now think of such things. Their establishment was a genuine turtle-dove's nest. Had the lady called on them yet ? They were at home assuredly, she had just seen the Venetian blinds open, in the Rue Vineuse. They loved the lady so much formerly that they would be very happy to receive her ! While mumbling these fragments of phrases, the old woman leered at Monsieur Rambaud. He listened to her, with the calmness of a brave man. The recollections awakened in him did not bring a shadow upon his peaceful countenance. He believed, however, that this beggar's persistency annoyed H  l  ne, and feeling in his pocket, he gave

her a dole in his turn, motioning to her to go away. When she saw a second white coin, old dame Fétu thanked him with a torrent of words. She would buy a little wood, she would warm her pain; that was the only thing that would ease her stomach. Yes, a real turtle-dove household, as proved by the lady's giving birth last winter to a second child, a beautiful little girl, rosy and fat, who must be nearly fourteen months old. On the day of the baptism, at the church-door, the doctor had put a hundred sous in her hand. Ah! good hearts come together, the lady brought her luck. Deign, O God! that the lady suffer no sorrow, heap on her prosperity in every way! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen!

Hélène stood upright, facing Paris, whilst old dame Fétu disappeared among the tombs, muttering three *Paters* and three *Aves*. It had ceased snowing, the last flakes had fallen on the roofs with a slow and lazy movement; and behind the melting mists, the golden rays of the sun overspread the pearl-gray sky with a rosy brightness. Over

Montmartre, a single band of blue bordered the horizon, a blue so faint and delicate that one might have said it was the shadow of white satin. Paris was gradually emerging from its smoke, and spreading out its fields of snow, its melting fetters that held it in the stillness of death. The city no longer quivered under the flying snow-flakes, whose pale waves trembled over the rust-colored house-fronts. The houses stood out in black masses against the white banks of snow that surrounded them, as if mouldy from centuries of damp. Entire streets appeared to be in ruins, devoured with saltpetre, the roofs almost giving way, and the windows already broken in. One square whose plastery surface one perceived, was filled with a heap of rubbish. But, in proportion as the blue band enlarged on the Montmartre side, a stream of light flowed as limpid and cold as spring-water, showing Paris as if under a glass, and even giving to the suburbs the distinctness of a Japanese picture.

Wrapped in her fur cloak, her hands hidden by the cuffs of her sleeves, H  l  ne was dreaming. A single thought reverted to her mind as an echo.

They had had a child, a rosy and fat little girl; and she pictured her at the adorable age when Jeanne began to talk. Little girls are so engaging when fourteen months old! She counted the months; fourteen, that would make almost two years, reckoning the others; just the time within a fortnight. Then she had a sunny vision of Italy, an ideal country, with golden fruits, where lovers rambled on balmy nights with their arms around each other's waists. Henri and Juliette were walking in front of her, in the moonlight. They were tender towards each other like spouses who experience anew the passion of lovers. A rosy and fat little girl, whose bare flesh expands at the kiss of the sun, whilst she is trying to stammer confused words, which her mother stifles under kisses! And Hélène thought of all this without anger, her heart silent, and in her sadness experiencing increasing calm. The land of the sun had disappeared, she was leisurely glancing over Paris, whose vast form winter had stiffened. Marble giants seemed to be wrapped in a peace as impervious as their own cold, their members weary from long-past

sufferings. A blue rift appeared above the Panthéon.

Meantime, her memory traveled over the past. She had lived in a state of stupor, at Marseilles. One morning, while going along the Rue des Petites-Maries, she sobbed as she passed before the home of her childhood. It was the last time that she had wept. Monsieur Rambaud came often; she felt his presence about her as a protection. He exacted nothing, he never penetrated her heart. One evening in autumn she had seen him enter with his eyes red, and crushed under the weight of a great sorrow: his brother, the Abbé Jouve, was dead. In her turn, she had consoled him. After that she remembered nothing distinctly. The Abbé seemed always behind them, and she yielded to the resignation with which he inspired her. Since he still urged her, she found no reason for a refusal. In fact, it appeared to be very sensible. As the period of her mourning drew near its close, of her own will, she calmly arranged all the details with Monsieur Rambaud. Her old friend's hands trembled in a frenzy of tenderness. As she wished,

he had waited for months, a sign sufficed for him. They were married in mourning attire. On the wedding-night, he also had kissed her bare feet, her feet as beautiful as those of a marble statue. And life was unfolded anew.

Whilst the blue sky was broadening on the horizon, that awakening of her memory surprised Hélène. Had she, then, been mad for a year? To-day, when she recalled the woman who had lived nearly three years in that room in the Rue Vineuse, she thought she was judging a stranger, whose conduct filled her with contempt and astonishment. What an act of madness, what an abominable wickedness, and all had happened with the unreasoning blindness of a thunderbolt! She had not desired it, however. She had been living in peace, hidden in her corner, and absorbed in her adoration of her daughter. The way had stretched out before her, and she followed it without curiosity, without desire. A breath had swept over her and she had fallen to the ground. Even at that moment, she could explain nothing. Her being had ceased to belong to her, another was

controlling her. Was it possible? she had done those things! Then an intense chill settled on her, Jeanne vanished beneath the roses. In the torpor of her sorrow, she again grew calm, without a desire, without curiosity, and continued her measured march on her direct road. Her life resumed its course, with all its chaste peace and honest pride.

Monsieur Rambaud took a step toward her, as he wishes to take her away from that sad spot. But Hélène, by a gesture, signified her desire to remain yet longer. She approached the parapet and looked down on the Avenue de la Muette, at a carriage-stand, where a line of old carriages, seamed by age, were ranged close to the sidewalk. The faded roofs and wheels, the moss-covered horses, seemed to have been rotting there since long-departed ages. Some coachmen remained motionless, stiff in their frozen cloaks. On the snow, other carriages, one by one, moved with difficulty. The animals were slipping, stretching out their necks, whilst the men, uttering oaths, descended from their boxes and held them by the reins; and through the windows could be seen the

figures of the patient occupants, leaning back against the cushions, resigned to the prospect of making a ten minutes' journey in three-quarters of an hour. The noises were deadened by the padding of snow; only the voices reached her from those streets, whose silence was deathlike, and their tones vibrated shrill and distinct: the sound of calls, of laughter by those tripping on the frozen paths, the angry notes of the whips cracked by carters, the snorting of a horse panting from fear. Farther on, to the right, the tall trees lining the quay were marvels. One would have said they were trees of spun glass, immense Venetian lustres, whose flower-work arms had been twisted by some whimsical artist. The north wind had changed the trunks into columns. Above, clustered downy branches and feathery plumes, an exquisite pattern of black twigs, bordered with white threads. It was freezing, and not a breath stirred the clear air.

Then H  l  ne said within herself that she did not know Henri. For a whole year she had seen him almost every day; he had remained for hours and

hours close to her, chatting, and gazing into her eyes. Still, she did not know him. One evening, she had yielded, and he had taken her. She did not know him, she struggled but without comprehending. Whence came he? how did he come to be near her? What man was he, that she had yielded to him, she who would rather die than yield to another? She was ignorant of him, she must have suffered from vertigo, and her reason must have tottered. On the last as on the first day, to her he was a stranger. In vain did she collect his scattered actions, words, and acts, and all that she recalled as to his person. He loved his wife and his child, his smile was refined, he maintained the correct attitude of a well-bred man. Then she saw again his inflamed countenance, his hands following the dictates of his passion. Weeks passed, he disappeared, he was taken out of her life. At this moment, she could not say where she had spoken to him for the last time. He passed, and his shadow had vanished with him. Their story had but one ending. She did not know him.

Over the city, a cloudless blue sky stretched. Hélène looked up, weary of her recollections, and happy, in the purity before her. The blue of the sky was limpid and very pale, hardly marked against the dazzling clearness of the sun. Low on the horizon, it shone with the brilliancy of a silver lamp. In the cold air, its rays shone without warming the atmosphere chilled by the snow. Below, like white cloth, edged with black, stretched out vast roofs, the tiles of the Manutention, and the slates of the houses on the quay. On the other side of the river, the square formed by the Champ de Mars formed a steppe on which the scarcely visible carriages appeared like black dots and made one think of Russian sledges filing past with the jingling of their bells; while the elms on the Quai d'Orsay, looking liliputian in the distance, formed lines of fine crystal flowers, bristling with needle-points. Beneath a motionless sea of ice, the Seine rolled its muddy waters between ermine-bordered banks; since the night before the ice had been drifting, and against the buttresses of the Pont des Invalides, one could

distinctly see the crushed blocks engulfed beneath the arches. The line of bridges seemed like ladder-steps of white lace, and stretched away, in increasingly delicate lines, as far as the glittering walls of the Cité, surrounded by the snowy peaks of the towers of Notre Dame. Other points, to the left, cleft the level plain of the quarters. Saint-Augustin, the Opéra, the Saint-Jacques tower, were, as it were, mountains crowned by eternal snows; nearer, the pavilions of the Tuileries and of the Louvre, connected by new buildings, outlined the ridge of a chain of hills with spotless summits. Again, on the right, rose the whitened peaks of the Invalides, of Saint-Sulpice and of the Panthéon, the latter very distant, outlining on the azure sky a fairy palace, with facings of bluish marble. Not a voice broke the silence. Streets might be divined by gray clefts, the squares looked like the hollows of a crevasse. Whole rows of houses had disappeared. Only the near-by fronts were recognizable by the thousand lines of their windows. The mantle of snow seemed lost in a dazzling distance, in a lake whose blue shadows blended with the

blue of the heavens. Paris, immense and clear, shone under the silver sun in the brightness of that freezing atmosphere.

Then Hélène's glance wandered for the last time over the impassive city; it, too, remained unknown to her. Again, she saw it, quiet and as if immortal, beneath the snow, such as she had left it, such as she had seen it every day during three years. Paris was to her full of her past. Before it she had loved, before it Jeanne had died. But the face of this every-day companion preserved its serenity, and feeling no emotion, was a mute witness of the laughter and tears borne on the waves of the Seine. According to her humor, she had believed it impelled by the ferocity of a monster, or the unlimited goodness of a giant. To-day, she felt that she would forever be ignorant of it in its indifference and breadth. It stretched out before her; it was the epitome of life.

Monsieur Rambaud, however, touched her lightly, to lead her away. His benign countenance was troubled. He murmured:

“Do not cause yourself any grief.”

He knew all, but could express himself in no other way. Madame Rambaud looked at him and was comforted. Her face was rosy from the cold, her eyes bright.

Already, she was far away. Life was beginning again.

"I do not remember if I properly closed the big trunk," she said.

Monsieur Rambaud promised to make sure of it. The train would leave at noon, they had time. Sand was being strewn on the streets, their carriage would not take an hour. But suddenly he raised his voice.

"I am certain that you have forgotten the fishing-rods!"

"Oh! quite!" she exclaimed, surprised, and vexed at her forgetfulness.

"We ought to have got them yesterday."

The rods referred to were very handy ones and such as were not sold at Marseilles. They owned, near the sea, a small country-house, where they were to spend the summer. Monsieur Rambaud looked at his watch. On their way to the railway

station, they could still buy the rods. They would tie them up with the umbrellas. Then he led her away, tramping and picking their way between the graves. The cemetery was empty, and only their footprints were left on the snow. Jeanne, dead, was left alone in front of Paris, forever.

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